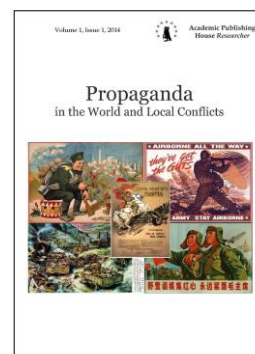


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Military Propaganda in the Russian Navy in the Period 1914–1915

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Abstract

This paper looks into the organization of military propaganda in the Russian Imperial Navy in the period 1914-1915. The author examines the rivalry in hostile propaganda between Russia and Germany during World War I in the Baltic and Black Sea theaters of military operations. The paper describes some of the key propaganda techniques employed by the nations of the Entente and those of the Triple Alliance; explores the rivalry in hostile propaganda between the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire; discusses the attitude toward World War I among the Navy's lower ranks and officers; provides an insight into the rationale behind patriotic sentiment among the personnel of the Russian Imperial Navy during the initial period of World War I; examines the role of Emperor Nicholas II and the State Duma in Russia's propaganda campaigns in its World War I fleet; illustrates how advantage was taken of the feats of clergymen, sailors, and officers in the Russian navy for propaganda purposes. Using specific examples from popular publications of the World War I period, the author touches upon how the media in pre-revolutionary Russia exploited the atrocities committed against the civilian population by Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey to spread military propaganda among the personnel of the Russian Imperial Navy. At the end of the paper, the author summarizes the key characteristics and principles of the organization of military propaganda in the Russian Imperial Navy in the period 1914–1915.

Keywords: Russian Imperial Navy, propaganda, World War I, German fleet, sailors, officers.

1. Introduction

As a general assessment of Russia's naval propaganda during World War I, it is worth noting its low efficiency. Importantly, during that time it was a part of the Russian Empire's overall military propaganda.

During World War I, much of the military propaganda within the Russian Imperial Navy was spread through the journal *Naval Digest* and a set of special publications from the Russian military establishment.

2. Materials and methods

The author drew upon materials from the repositories of the Russian State Naval Archive (Saint Petersburg). Use was also made of publications from the journal *Naval Digest* and several research studies.

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The work employed a set of research methods that are common in research on military propaganda in the Russian Imperial Navy. In addition, the author made use of a set of general methods of research too. A special use was made of the historical-situational method – to compare the propaganda techniques employed in the Russian and German navies.

3. Discussion and results

The August issue of Naval Digest opened the topic of World War I with Nicholas II's manifesto announcing the beginning of warfare against Germany ([Manifest, 1914](#)).

Yet, there were some appeals in the navy that even eclipsed the tsar's manifesto in patriotism. For instance, on August 1, 1914, Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Baltic Fleet N.O. Essen approached the fleet's personnel with the following mandate:

“Officers and members of the crew!

From this day out, each one of us must put our personal matters aside and try to concentrate all our thoughts and will on the sole objective – to protect our motherland from enemy intrusion and confront our enemies without hesitation, thinking only about dealing them the heaviest blows possible.

A war is decided on the battlefield. We need to exert all our powers, both physical and spiritual, and employ all our experience and ability on the day of a battle to ensure that our shells and mines cause destruction and demise across the enemy's battle lines and ships.

The enemy has immense power and experience. It will try to exploit our weaknesses and errors straightaway. We need to do our best to prevent that from happening as much as possible.

Remember that the only way for us to be of maximum help to each other in a battle is to amplify our offensive production and try to keep up the pressure on the enemy with a view to dealing it as heavy blows as possible, by employing all our available forces and combat resources. May each of us fulfill our greatest duty to our motherland – protect it with our life, and follow in the footsteps of those who, alongside the great Emperor, set our navy in motion 200 years ago with their feats and blood in these waters” ([Zolotarev, Kozlov, 1998](#)).

Through World War I, military propaganda in the Russian fleet would take on a more professional form. More specifically, in September of 1914 Naval Digest carried an insightful article entitled ‘The World War: The Casus Belli and the Course of the Diplomatic Negotiations which Led to the Breach’ ([Mirovaya voina, 1914](#)). As a logical sequel to this publication, there came out the following sections: Russian Official Communiqués on the War ([Russkie ofitsial'nye soobshcheniya..., 1914](#)), Naval Chronicle ([Morskaya khronika, 1914. № 9](#)), and Feature Stories about the World War’ ([Klado, 1914](#)). Imbued with a sense of patriotism, all of these sections covered military action on the sea, and all of them accused Germany of bringing about a global catastrophe. Note that the last three sections remained in place virtually throughout the period the Imperial Russian Navy was in operation as a military unit, i.e. from 1914 to early 1917 ([RGA VMF. F. 431. Op. 1. D. 714. L. 110–111](#)).

Apart from Naval Digest, there were also in place a number of publications from the Naval Ministry of Russia. For instance, in December of 1914, they launched into circulation in Petrograd an illustrated military journal entitled ‘The Army and the Navy’, which would appear twice a week under the editorship of A.D. Dolmatov ([Russkaya voennaya periodicheskaya..., 1959](#)).

Initially, the Russian military propaganda machine focused its activity on the Baltic theater of military operations ([RGA VMF. F. 1. Op. 1. D. 5. L. 15](#)). A practice employed to accentuate the role of the Baltic fleet in the warfare was citing the foreign press. For instance, it was reported that on August 7, 1914 a British newspaper wrote the following: “The German navy is outside the boundaries of the Baltic Sea, forced to stay at the ports” ([Voina: Khronika i otkliki, 1914. № 1](#)). Just a few days later, the official propaganda machine stated the following in a report quoting an English source: “The Russian navy has sustained no losses in personnel” ([Voina: Khronika i otkliki, 1914. № 2](#)).

Soon, the Baltic fleet enjoyed a series of substantial successes. In late July and early August of 1915, the opponent undertook several attempts to break through to the Gulf of Riga. Covered by the battleships, the minesweepers started to sweep the channel in Irbe Strait. The Baltic fleet bravely engaged in a battle against the outnumbering opponent. In the early hours of August 4, the destroyer Novik attacked the new German destroyers V-99 and V-100 and had them on the run ([Krasnoznamennyi Chernomorskii flot, 1987](#)). During the pursuit, one of the ships was damaged by

artillery fire, and the other one ran into a mine barrier, blew up, and sank. The crew of the gunboat Sivuch fought a successful battle against the cruiser Augsburg and two German destroyers (RGA VMF. F. 716. Op. 1. D. 187. L. 112) (Fig. 1).

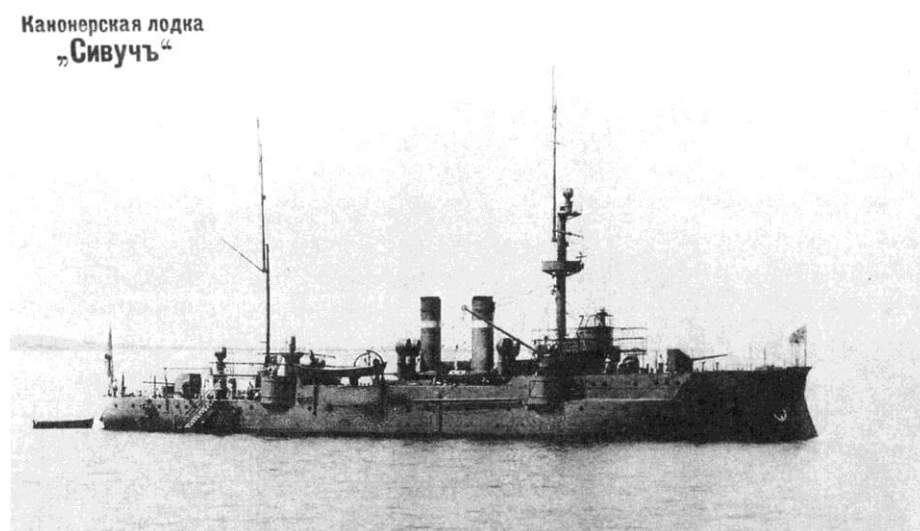


Fig. 1. Gunboat Sivuch

Generally, the Russian military propaganda machine employed the technique of citing the allies' press in relation to the Russian navy quite often during World War I. For instance, in September of 1915 the journal *Naval Digest* cited the delight of foreign publications with the heroism of sailors in the Russian navy: "The English press has called the valiant behavior of the commander and the entire crew of the gunboat Sivuch epic heroism" [this was regarding the battle with the German navy in the Gulf of Riga in August of 1915]. Here are a few other quotes from the journal: "The papers are likening the behavior of the Sivuch crew to that of the crew of a small English vessel that in the 16th century destroyed a large Spanish brig off the Azores, quoting extracts from poems devoted to this glorious cause"; "The Star has stated in a passionately written story that the world is certain to remember the heroism of the Sivuch crew long after all other events of this titanic war are consigned to history"; "The victory of the Russian navy in the Gulf of Riga and the successful assistance of the English submarines have produced a burst of inspiration within London" (Morskaya khronika, 1915. № 9).

The Baltic fleet undertook active action with regard to the enemy's sea-lanes. In the southern and southwestern parts of the sea, the cruisers and destroyers were active up until mid-February in setting up mine barriers, which would help hamper the German navy's military and transportation activity in the Baltic Sea. It is these barriers that helped blow up the German cruisers Danzig, Bremen, and Lübeck and a German destroyer.

By the fall of 1915, the Baltic fleet had 14 submarines. In the course of the campaign, these attacked German combat and transport ships 53 times. This included the armored cruiser Prinz Adalbert, the cruiser Undine, a torpedo boat, and 15 transports (RGA VMF. F. 736. Op. 1. D. 318. L. 27).

The activity of Russian submarines was a matter of deep concern to the German leadership. In October of 1915, the steam navigation companies announced the cessation of navigation in the Baltic Sea. In this regard, the German leadership had to fortify Germany's underwater defense in the theater. It also resolved to conduct most of Germany's transportation activity via Swedish territorial waters.

In 1915, the German navy failed to achieve any of its objectives, losing in the Baltic Sea three cruisers, seven destroyers, a submarine, a minelayer, seven minesweepers, five patrol and lookout ships, and 24 transports (RGA VMF. F. 759. Op. 1. D. 35. L. 84). Damage was done to a battlecruiser, three cruisers, three destroyers, and four minesweepers.

By contrast, the Russian Baltic fleet did achieve its objectives. Its losses were relatively minor – two gunboats, two minelayers, three minesweepers, and eight auxiliary vessels and transports.

Note that the Naval Chronicle section of Naval Digest started to publish adverse material about the German navy right from the war's outset: "It has been reported that the cruiser Augsburg started to bombard Libava [Liepāja] at a time the city was living the common life of a resort. At that moment, the beach was, naturally, full of people, many of whom were ordinary Germans. After firing a few shells at the port, with several of them purposefully directed at a hospital, the troublemaker cruiser was unable to resist the temptation of doing some more damage and fired two more shells in the direction of the public on the beach. Fortunately, both shells burrowed into the shore's ground, sending heavy plumes of sand into the air; there were no casualties ... The moral outcomes of the feat accomplished by the cruiser Augsburg need no comment. The prestige of the German navy could not but be compromised in the eyes of Russian Baltic Germans learning that their children, wives, and sisters could at any moment become an aimless victim of German cruelty" ([Morskaya khronika, 1914. № 9](#)). Another example is the following statement by N.L. Klado in his 'Feature Stories about the World War': "The German race is contaminated with haughty contempt for other peoples" ([Klado, 1914](#)). This sentiment was picked up in a work by N. Kolychov entitled 'The Capital Sin of the German Nation', which started to be published in Naval Digest in April of 1915. The work condemned Germany's aggression against the Slav world ([Kolochoy, 1915. № 4](#)). It was completed only in December of 1915, concluding in the following words: "While calling itself the carrier of genuine humanity and the most consistent expressor of the ideas of primordial Christianity, the German nation has totally forgotten that it is not in vain that Christianity lists envy, pride, and wrath among the deadly sins, i.e. some of the mankind's gravest sins. Having resigned themselves to the control of their sinful feelings, the German people have come to believe they can do whatever they want, so murder follows naturally from their concept of the state.

Having, thus, placed themselves above the law, the German people have doubly committed a great mortal sin.

They have committed a great crime against the neighboring states, having exposed millions of people to untold misfortunes from fire and sword.

They have also committed a mortal sin against themselves, having strangled in themselves the principles of humanity, whereby they have condemned themselves to spiritual and physical death" ([Kolochoy, 1915. № 12](#)).

In general, the moral appearance of the enemy in the Baltic Sea was being painted in quite dark colors. For instance, there was the following brief communiqué of August 27, 1914: "In the North Sea, fishing boats disguised as Belgian vessels were scattering mines" ([Voyna: Khronika i otkliki, 1914. № 2](#)).

Interestingly, while not paying due attention to the destruction in the Baltic Sea of the German cruiser Magdeburg, Naval Digest released a more original article, one entitled 'Whips and Brushes'. Here is an excerpt from it: "In looking over the German cruiser Magdeburg, blown up off our coast, a curious circumstance was discovered that shed light on certain practices common in the German navy. In each of the officer's cabins, government-issue whips were found, which were stamped and registered in the ship's stock record" ([Pleti ili shchetki, 1914](#)). This implied harsh treatment of members of the lower ranks by naval officers in the German navy. The success of the Baltic fleet, expressed in the sinking of the cruiser Magdeburg on August 13, 1914, found reflection in the pages of the patriotic publication War: Chronicle and Responses ([Voyna: Khronika i otkliki, 1914. № 1](#)) ([Fig. 2](#)).



Fig. 2. Sinking of the German cruiser Magdeburg (postcard).

As early as November of 1914, they started to publish the roster of officers in the Russian navy who died, were wounded, or went missing as a result of battles during World War I ([Spisok ofitserov flota..., 1914](#)).

However, soon after the start of the war, Russia's military propaganda became concentrated on the Black Sea theater of military operations. Most importantly, the clash with Turkey was to help achieve the Russian Empire's objectives in World War I. According to participants in the 130th Congress of the Slavic Union, held in Saint Petersburg on August 1, 1914 (on a side note, the empire's capital was renamed into Petrograd on August 18, 1914, which was done for propaganda purposes as well), the following step was decided upon at the concluding dinner: "To be able to achieve the Union's economic objectives, we need to ensure free egress from the Black and Baltic Seas, with the keys from the Black Sea being in the hands of Russia" ([Voina: Khronika i otkliki, 1914. № 1](#)). The sentiment of Slavic Union delegates was echoed in an article by N. Nordman entitled 'The War with Turkey and Its Implications', published in Naval Digest, which suggested that the objective of ensuring Russia's control over the Black Sea straits be achieved by way of arms ([Nordman, 1914](#)) (Fig. 3).

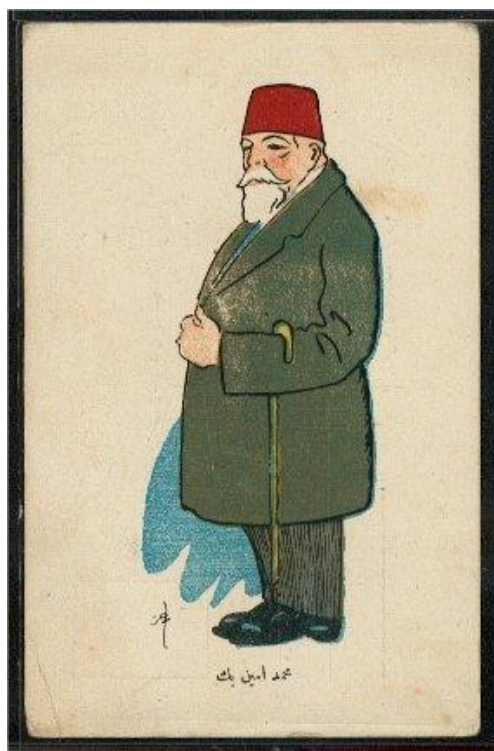


Fig. 3. Sultan Mehmed V (postcard)

In addition, the Turkish navy was a rather advantageous target for Russian military propaganda. This fact was best expressed by Academician M.N. Pokrovsky: “If Russian admirals do not make preternatural errors, our edge over the Turkish fleet will well be assured” (Pokrovsky, 1928).

A condescending tone toward the new enemy is present even in the imperial manifesto announcing Russia’s declaration of war on Turkey: “The Turkish navy led by the Germans has dared to treacherously attack our Black Sea coast... We are adamant in our belief that Turkey’s reckless interference with military action will only speed up the disastrous course of events for it and open Russia a way to achieving the historic objectives in the Black Sea bequeathed to it by our forefathers” (Vtoraya Otechestvennaya voina..., 1916).

When it comes to Turkey, the Russian military propaganda machine always tried to present it to the navy as a weak opponent. This may be illustrated by the following piece in Naval Digest, published in the Naval Chronicle section: “On the night of November 29, 1915, a detachment of 25 men, captured in Tarutino, was transported to Odessa. These Turks look miserable” (Morskaya khronika, 1915. № 1).

However, not everything was going so smoothly in the war with the Turks at sea. On October 15, 1914, an official news report stated that the Black Sea fleet did not meet up with the enemy at sea and had to return to Sevastopol (RGA VMF. F. 417. Op. 5. D. 710. L. 21). In reality, during that time there took place two major battles. The first one was a raid by two Turkish torpedo vessels into the port of Odessa on October 16, which ended in the sinking of the gunboat Donets, the damaging of the gunboat Kubanets, several merchant ships, and an oil tank, and the shelling by the cruiser Goeben of Sevastopol, the Black Sea fleet’s main base. A special focus was laid by the military propaganda machine on the enemy’s cruelty: “One shell [during Goeben’s shelling of Sevastopol] got into the coal warehouses, another hit the railbed, and another exploded near a naval hospital, killing two of the patients and wounding eight members of the lower ranks” (Voina: Khronika i otkliki, 1914. № 1). Note that the official bulletin provided an objective account of the losses incurred by the Russian navy in the battle: “Two officers, a priest, 26 members of the lower ranks dead on the transport Prut; seven members of the lower ranks dead and seven wounded on the torpedo boat Lieutenant Pushchin; seven members of the lower ranks wounded on the gunboat Kubanets and the ship’s doctor dead on the gunboat Donets”. Concurrently, mention was made of

the heroic death of lieutenant Roguzsky, who blew up the transport Prut, which was not armed with artillery, to prevent it from being captured by the Turks, and the desperate attack of the torpedo boat Lieutenant Pushchin on the cruiser Goeben.

In light of the tragic circumstances, with participation from an archpriest of naval clergy, the official propaganda machine commemorated the heroic death of 70-year-old hieromonk Antony, who was a chaplain on the transport Prut: “At the time the transport Prut was sinking, hieromonk Antony was on the deck blessing members of the crew with a cross in his hand. Some of the crew made passionate attempts to convince Antony to escape in a lifeboat. However, the hieromonk categorically refused to do so, choosing to give up his place on a lifeboat for a crewmate. He descended from the deck to the cabin, put on his vestment, and ascended back to the deck, where he started to bless the crew, holding a cross and a gospel-book. Once the entire crew was taken off the ship, Antony headed to the cabin. A few moments later, the ship began to sink. On a side note, the late clergyman came from a religious family in the Samara Diocese. Educated in the Samara Ecclesiastical School, he lived for a dozen years in various monasteries as a regular monk. In 1909, Antony was assigned to the transport Prut as a clergyman” (*Voina: Khronika i otkliki*, 1914. № 1).

To mitigate the negative impression from the incursions made by the Turkish navy on October 29, 1914, the Russian military propaganda machine focused on glorifying the local success of the Black Sea fleet: “Having approached the port of Zonguldak, the fleet’s commander sent two ships with torpedo-boats to destroy the port facilities and repair shops. This objective was accomplished successfully, and, on top of that, we were able to sink a steamer that was at the wharf. In the meantime, our lookout cruiser spotted a Turkish troopship with soldiers aboard. Seeing the transport rush for the shore in an attempt to save the troops it was transporting, the cruiser overtook it, opened fire at it, and sank it. After that, the fleet retreated into the sea. Some time later, they noticed in the fog two vessels on the fleet’s left flank, which turned out to be the enemy’s transports. One of them, Midhat Pasha, was running under a military flag. The torpedo vessels sent to destroy these two transports soon detected a third one as well. All three, loaded with equipment for troops, automobiles, aeroplanes, and heavy guns, were sunk. From the sinking transports the Russian crew picked up and captured 248 men, including several German officers and one staff officer with some documentation on him. Based on the captives’ testimony, the transports were going to the port of Ünye, and from there they were to reengage in transporting the troops to Trebizond”. On November 6, 1914, there was an official report of the Black Sea fleet shelling the enemy’s barracks and wireless telegraph in Trebizond. During this operation, aimed at having the Black Sea fleet to destroy the ports of Trebizond and Zonguldak, the official military propaganda machine made note of the Turks’ atrocities committed against the Christian portion of the ports’ population: “Frustrated with their failures, the Turks began to see in any non-Moslem a traitor and a secret agent working for an opposing superpower. Quite naturally, the Turks did not yield to the Germans, their friends and allies, in means of reprisal. For instance, in Zonguldak and Trebizond, subsequent to the bombardment of these ports by the Black Sea fleet, the Turks hanged several dozen Armenians over suspicions that they had signaled to the Russian ships, with the corpses of some of the executed impaled to the masts of sailing ships to be left there, with colored lanterns and flags inserted in their eye-sockets, until they were defleshed by vultures” (*Vtoraya Otechestvennaya voina...*, 1916) (Fig. 4).

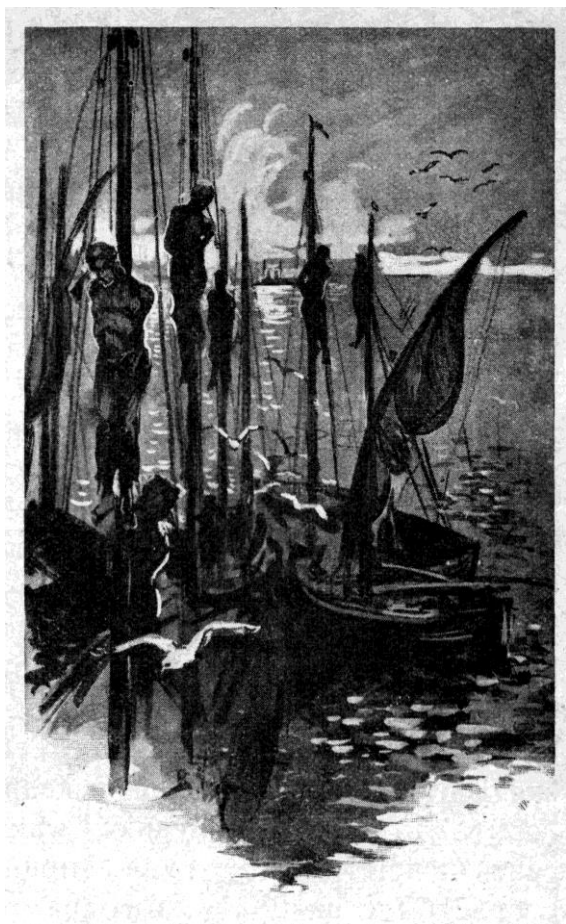


Fig. 4. Atrocities by the Turks

Special attention was devoted to the success achieved on November 7, 1914 by coastal artillerymen in the city of Tuapse during a shootout with the Turkish cruiser *Hamidiye*. The article states that the artillerymen managed to defend the city, whilst the Turks achieved only insignificant results – just one dead civilian and a dozen wounded. In addition, among the wounded were three men from the lower ranks and a nurse.

Quite a detailed account was provided of the battle between the battlecruiser *Goeben* and the Black Sea fleet's command ship *Evstafi* on November 7, 1914. The account mentions the losses incurred by the Russians: "The battle left the following dead: lieutenant Yevgeny Myazovsky, sublieutenants Nikolai Eiler, Nikolai Semenov, and Sergei Grigorenko, and 29 members of the lower ranks. A serious wound was suffered by sublieutenant Nikolai Gnilyosyrov. Among the lower ranks, 24 were wounded, with 19 of these wounded seriously" ([Voina: Khronika i otkliki, 1914. № 1](#)). The military propaganda machine utilized official documents as well. For instance, use was made of the following telegram sent by Supreme Commander of the Russian Army Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich after the battle of *Goeben* and *Evstafi*: "I am happy to communicate to you the contents of a telegram from our His Majesty the Emperor: 'Extend to the Black Sea fleet my gratitude for its successful actions and the zealous service of its crew. Nicholas.'" ([Vtoraya Otechestvennaya voina..., 1916](#)).

On December 1, 1914, the official propaganda machine singled out as a success the sinking of the large German steamer *Derintie*, which significantly complicated for the Turks the transportation of military freight to the port of Trebizond ([RGA VMF. F. 418. Op. 1. D. 127. L. 12](#)). Impressive figures for Russia's propaganda were provided by the Black Sea fleet's attack on December 27, 1914 on the bays of Sürmene and Rize, which destroyed 51 enemy ships. That being said, it was not mentioned anywhere which class the sunken ships were – most of them were likely to have been of little military or strategic value in terms of the organization of freight transportation.

In parallel with creating a negative image of the enemy, the military propaganda machine was cultivating a positive image of the Russian navy's lower ranks. In this context, of interest is the following description of a Christmas celebration during a campaign by the Black Sea fleet, which quotes the sailors as exclaiming: "Let's set up a Christmas tree for the captives, if we get any!... We sure will, 'cause we've never come back without prisoners!..." (*Vtoraya Otechestvennaya voina...*, 1916).

However, the period's official publications did not strictly write about how cunning the Germans were – sometimes, they were openly spoken of with generosity as well. For instance, it was reported that on October 16, 1914 a group of German officers had had the following note delivered to the person in charge of the harbor of Theodosia: "Inform the civilian population – males, females, and children – that in two hours we will start bombarding government-issue buildings and private warehouses, tracks, and structures" (*Vtoraya Otechestvennaya voina...*, 1916). Note that overall the Russian military propaganda machine presented the Germans to the Russian navy in a more negative light than it did the Turks (e.g., "At the very edge of the embankment there stood five men, two of whom were dressed as Turkish officers. Next to them stood a third man, who was wearing German uniform; these were officers from a cruiser that had caught my eye in the bay. The officers were having a lively chat with members of the local administration and the Turkish consul. The officer in German uniform did not take part in the conversation, as he was busy observing the city and its outskirts through his binoculars. Curiously, the crowd was not angered as much at the sight of the Turks as it was at the sight of the German. Having discerned his uniform, they reacted with loud grumbling".) (*Vtoraya Otechestvennaya voina...*, 1916).

In 1915, the Russian navy was supplemented by a few new ships. On June 24, they put into operation the battleship *Empress Maria*, and on October 5 they introduced *Empress Catherine the Great*, a battleship of the same class. This class of ship had a displacement of 22,600 tons and a speed of 21–23 knots, was armed with 12 305 mm and 20 130 mm guns, and was built with heavy 102–305 mm thick belt armor. Between May and September, the fleet was also supplemented by the destroyers *Bystry* ['fast'], *Gromky* ['loud'], *Schastlivy* ['happy'], *Pylky* ['ardent'], and *Pospeshny* ['hasty'], six submarines, and the sea-plane carriers *Nicholas I* and *Alexander I* with sea-planes aboard. Adding these ships provided a significant boost to the navy's military potential (*Krasnoznamennyi Chernomorskii flot*, 1987).

By 1915, the Black Sea fleet's upper hand became increasingly stronger, which enabled the military propaganda machine to assume a more vigorous tone (*RGA VMF. F. 431. Op. 1. D. 755. L. 57*). An article published on October 15, 1915 in the patriotic publication *War: Chronicle and Responses* gave a depreciatory estimation of the potential of the Turkish sailors: "In the Black Sea, the Turkish navy was being concentrated in its base, in the straits, in an attempt to avoid engaging in battle with our fleet" (*Voina: Khronika i otkliki*, 1915. № 4). Later on, as part of its coverage of events in the Black Sea theater of naval operations, *Naval Digest* reported: "The Black Sea sailors are delighted with the pilots' bravery and prowess. Helping adjust the artillery fire of our vessels during the bombardment of the Bosphorus, the air squadron kept the whole time over the enemy's batteries, which started shooting at it, the fire accompanied by salvos from the infantry guns – testimony to confusion among the Turks. Out of all the shells fired at our airplanes, just four bullets hit one of them. Each of the pilots got off without a single scratch" (*Morskaya khronika*, 1915. № 5).

Apart from covering the course of military action, *Naval Digest* also commemorated all major events associated with the Russian navy. For instance, in June of 1915 an article by K. Zhitkovich entitled 'Admiral N.O. Essen' pays tribute to the memory of the prominent Russian naval commander (*Zhitkovich*, 1915).

A month later, in July of 1915, the journal's *Naval Chronicle* section presented the following picture of heroic togetherness among the crew of the transport *Yenisei*, destroyed by a torpedo fired from a German submarine: "Strong in spirit and inspired by the example of their superiors, the crew exhibited total equanimity, courage, and exemplary discipline. Benumbed by the ice-cold water, the drowning men found the courage, in the teeth of death, to exclaim "Hurrah!" in honor of their ship even at the moment their crewmates were getting submerged below the surface of the water" (*Morskaya khronika*, 1915. № 7).

Naval Digest also wrote about the feats of members of the navy's lower ranks who fought in the land forces. For instance, there was a story about the heroism of Petr Semenishchev, a sailor-electrician in the Baltic fleet who distinguished himself by helping overcome the mine barriers laid

by the Austrians in the River Vistula. For this, he was decorated with a Fourth Degree Cross of St. George (*Morskaya khronika*, 1915. № 10). Afterwards, he would receive a Second Degree Cross of St. George from the hands of Emperor Nicholas II himself for his courage in hand-to-hand fighting.

Another event that the military propaganda machine took advantage of is the demise of the ocean liner *Lusitania*, sunk by a German submarine. In this context, *Naval Digest* carried the following unusual communiqué: “A local peasant named Yurchik, who was aboard *Lusitania* crossing the ocean, is back in Pinsk from America. It has become known that after the blast Yurchik flew over board and had to stay afloat for four hours using a piece of wood. He then became unconscious. Yurchik’s stories about the last minutes of *Lusitania* suggest a horror that defies description. Thousands of men, women, and children were scurrying around the deck in sheer consternation and jumping into lifeboats and the water, with heartrending cries for help. The steamer kept afloat for five minutes and disappeared into the depths of the sea, taking with it the numerous victims of German atrocities. Out of the 77 peasants from Minsk Governorate who had accompanied Yurchik, just two survived” (*Morskaya khronika*, 1915. № 12). (Fig. 7).

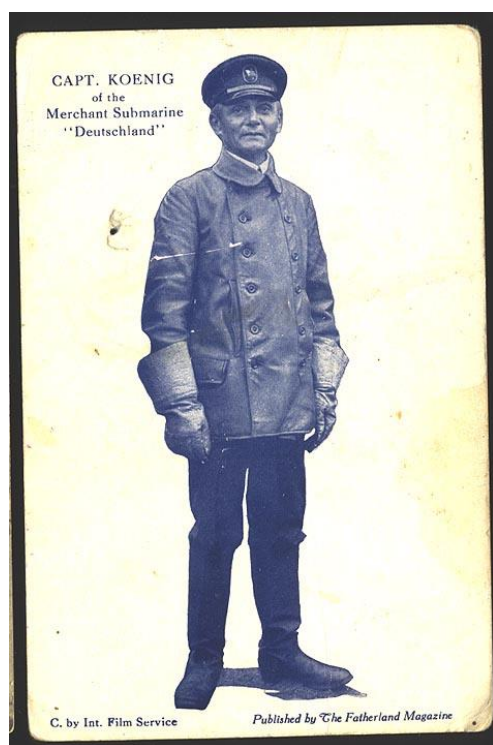


Fig. 5. Commanding officer of the merchant submarine *Deutschland* Paul König (postcard).

In late 1915, the journal *Naval Digest* published, as part of propaganda used to foster a spiritual bond between the leadership and the people in pursuit of war objectives, a report about a visit of State Duma deputies to the fleet: “...Yesterday morning, a group of deputies returned to Petrograd after having presented the Baltic fleet with an icon of St. Nicholas on behalf of the members of the State Duma who had sailed a year and a half ago aboard the squadron’s ships and looked over Revel and the skerries. The trip participants included the following six members of the State Duma: Skoropadsky, Count Kapnist, Nechaev, Gorstkin, Khanenko, and Lashkevich. The deputies visited Revel and Helsingfors. In doing so, they traveled between the two towns by sea, aboard one of our cruisers. The deputies looked over the squadron’s vessels. They were delighted with what they saw. The sailors’ high spirits made a most positive impression on them all” (*Morskaya khronika*, 1915. № 10).

4. Conclusion

During the period 1914-1915, military propaganda was carried out in the Russian navy using a plethora of techniques, including fostering togetherness between the government and the people, cultivating the image of an impudent, ruthless enemy, spreading examples of heroism displayed

daily by sailors and officers, and providing examples of praise of the Russian Imperial Navy from the foreign press. Many of the techniques employed were unprecedented in the practice of information war against the opponent. That being said, through the course of World War I the Russian official propaganda machine would be in for a real test – an upsurge in anti-war sentiment both behind the lines and at the front.

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