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THE RUSSIAN NAVY.

Translated, by permission, from "La Vie Contemporaine" by Commander H. GARBETT, R.N.

As a Russo-French alliance and the state of the Russian Navy has a good deal occupied the attention of the English Press and expert writers during the last three months, it may interest some readers of the Journal to learn the views of a French naval officer, a well-known writer on naval matters, on the present fighting value of the Russian fleet. On one point in his paper, however, I do not think that many officers either in England or of foreign countries will be found to agree with him, viz., that the Russian Black Sea fleet, in consequence of Treaty regulations, may be looked upon as "une quantité négligeable" in reckoning possible combinations.—H. G.

In consequence of her extensive coast line, and of the fact that her maritime frontiers are far apart from each other, Russia is obliged to maintain four fleets, each having its own distinct personnel and matériel, viz.: the Baltic, Black Sea, Caspian, and Siberian fleets.

Since the visit of the Russian squadron to Toulon, every Frenchman has been asking, "What is the composition, what is the strength, and what is the real value of the Russian naval forces?"

In order to reply to these questions, I shall content myself with an examination of the ships possessing any fighting value, and shall omit the numerous vessels without protection or speed, which the Russian Admiralty, following the example of other naval Powers, maintain for special service in times of peace, but which, on the outbreak of hostilities, will be prudently consigned to the shelter of harbour. In a word, I shall only cite those ships which are fit to fall into line in case of war.

I. *The Baltic Fleet.*

Six sea-going battle-ships.—One of these, the double-turret ship "Peter Velikie," dates from 1872, and has only a speed of 14 knots, but the five others are of quite recent construction (1887—1892), have a speed of 16 knots, and are heavily armoured and carry powerful armaments.

Nine armoured cruisers.—One of these, launched in 1867, ought scarcely to be counted under this head, as she is deficient both structurally and in speed according to modern ideas; of the remaining eight, five are of a very moderate speed, so that there remain only three, the "Rurik," "Admiral Nakhimoff," and "Pamyat-Azova," which are fully equal to all the exigencies of modern naval war.

20 armoured coast-defence ships.—All these ships are old, dating

from 1863 to 1868. Their speed is small and armour protection weak.

Three armoured gunboats.—These are quite new, steam 15 knots, and are heavily armed.

Two protected cruisers.—These vessels have an armoured deck, which protects their vitals; one, the "Rynda," has a speed of only 15 knots, but the other, the "Admiral Korniloff," steams 18·5, a speed sufficient to make her useful as a cruiser.

Three torpedo-cruisers.—All new vessels, with a speed of from 20 to 22 knots.

27 torpilleurs-de-haute-mer.—Their speed varies from 19 to 25 knots; they are nearly all of them excellent boats for their work.

94 1st and 2nd class torpedo-boats for coast defence.

II. *The Black Sea Fleet.*

Five sea-going battle-ships.—All are modern ships, the oldest having been launched in 1886; they are vessels of a very formidable type, heavily armoured, and carrying a peculiarly heavy armament, and all have a speed of from 16 to 17 knots.

Two armoured coast-defence ships.—These are the celebrated circular vessels, known as the Popoffkas.

Two torpedo-cruisers.—These are modern vessels; one has a speed of 18·5, the other of 21 knots.

16 torpilleurs-de-haute-mer.—Their speed varies from 18 to 22 knots; but the latest, the "Adler," built last year by the Schichau firm at Elbing, attained a speed of 26·5 knots.

Two torpedo-transports.—These vessels, unfortunately, are of slow speed.

Seven 1st class torpedo-boats for coast defence.

III. *The Siberian and Caspian Flotillas.*

In Siberia Russia has a small squadron, consisting of 4 gunboats, 4 torpilleurs-de-haute-mer, and 6 torpedo-boats for coast defence. On the Caspian are 2 gunboats and some small steamers, which are for patrol and police duty.

IV. *Vessels in course of Construction.*

To the preceding vessels, all of which are ready for sea, or very nearly so, must be added the ships which are not yet complete, but which will before long be added to the effective strength of the Russian naval forces. In course of construction in the different yards on the Neva are 4 1st class battle-ships, 2 coast-defence battle-ships, and 5 torpilleurs-de-haute-mer; 2 armoured cruisers of an improved "Rurik" type have just been laid down, and another battle-ship is to be also immediately commenced, as well as 2 torpedo-cruisers and 8 more torpilleurs-de-haute-mer. In the Black Sea dockyards one 1st class battle-ship, the "Three Saints,"

has lately been launched, and two more are to be laid down as early as may be, while a torpedo-cruiser is approaching completion. All the battle-ships will be heavily armoured, powerfully armed, and have a speed of 17·5 knots.

The above classification may be called the geographical grouping of the Russian Navy, and it may be interesting if we now place the different elements in tactical order, so that it may be seen at a glance what efforts Russia will be capable of making at the present time in the event of a naval war. In the first table we shall give the number of ships of the offensive fleet, or the 1st line; in the second, the defensive fleet, or 2nd line. The first table will thus give the fleet which will be able to put to sea to act on the offensive, the second the strength of the fleet for defence of the coast.

The Fleet of the 1st Line.

In the Baltic: 5 battle-ships, 3 armoured cruisers, 2 protected cruisers, 3 torpedo-cruisers, and 27 torpilleurs-de-haute-mer.

In the Black Sea: 5 battle-ships, 6 1st class gun-vessels, 2 torpedo-cruisers, and 16 torpilleurs-de-haute-mer.

Fleet of the 2nd Line.

In the Baltic: 1 battle-ship, 20 armoured coast-defence ships, 6 armoured cruisers, 11 2nd class cruisers, and 90 coast-defence torpedo-boats.

In the Black Sea: 2 coast-defence battle-ships and 7 coast-defence torpedo-boats.

Of the Black Sea fleet it is hardly necessary to speak, as at present its radius of action is confined to that sea, and, should it be wished to send it into the Mediterranean, it would probably have to force a passage through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, as the Turks jealously refuse the right of passage to ships of war. In case of war, then, these Straits would have to be forced, and, putting Turkey on one side, the Russian ships would probably find themselves face to face with a certain powerful navy, which is pleased to consider itself as the guardian of the passage into the Archipelago. Will Russia, then, play this great game? We may be permitted to doubt it.

The Baltic fleet, then, is the only one which can be regarded as the active fleet of Russia, as its European fleet in fact; and it is with this alone, then, that we have to deal. The proportion of the different units which compose it is satisfactory; the number of cruisers in ratio to the battle-ships is good, and that of the torpilleurs-de-haute-mer high. With regard to the coast defence and other vessels of the second line, they make up a presentable force.

Selecting among the torpilleurs-de-haute-mer those having the highest speed, the heaviest tonnage, and a suitable armament (the bulk of the Russian boats carry two 37 mm. Q.F. guns, steam 21 knots, and are over 100 tons displacement), it will be easy to attach

to each of the five battle-ships two "contre-torpilleurs," which is the least number considered indispensable for every battle-ship forming part of a squadron. As scouts the eight cruisers which figure in the preceding table would be employed, and in this way a fighting homogeneous squadron sufficiently rapid and sufficiently protected against an enemy's projectiles would be constituted.

If, however, we subtract from this squadron, as has been done, a battle-ship and three cruisers in order to form the Naval Division in the Mediterranean, it will be materially reduced, and there are some who will be of opinion that the Russian Government would have been well advised if it had given up the idea of organizing this division in a sea where it is not obliged to take action and had retained its whole forces in the waters of the North, where they could play a very active part against one of the Navies of the Triple Alliance.

To this criticism the reply is possible, that the inconvenience we have pointed out will gradually diminish in the future in proportion as the new fighting units leave the Russian dockyards. Thanks, in effect, to these future units, it will not be long before Russia will have sufficient forces to play not only its rôle in the North, but also to provide a strong division for the Mediterranean.

If this division is one day to co-operate with us we have a right to demand that it shall be constituted in the form most useful for ourselves. At the present time, for example, our squadrons are short of cruisers, or, rather, they are less abundantly provided with scouts than they ought to be. Under these circumstances it would be better for the Russian squadron to consist only of cruisers. The battle-ship is not required, as we have more of them in the Mediterranean than the Austrians and Italians combined, so that a cruiser in place of the "Emperor Nicolas" would be doubly welcome.

With regard to the rôle of Russia in the North I do not think that I need say more. If circumstances call for their support it is not necessary to be a great strategist to see that her natural mission will be to paralyse the German forces.

But in our satisfaction at feeling ourselves no longer isolated in Europe, but the friends of a great nation, we must not lose sight of the weak point in these attractive combinations; for the six winter months the Baltic is closed by ice and all navigation suspended between November and April. If war, then, is declared in March the Russian battle-ships, cruisers, and torpedo-boats will be immovable at Cronstadt, and the German forts and squadron will have nothing to fear from their assault. This annual immobility of the fleet will come to an end it is true when Libau, where for the last five years great harbour works have been carried out (an immense basin, among other things, 5 km. square and with a depth of 32 ft., is being constructed), shall have become as important, as complete, and as well fitted out an arsenal as Cronstadt. The roadstead of Libau, situated in Courland at the southern extremity of the Russian Baltic coasts, possesses the great advantage over Cronstadt of never freezing over in winter.

When the new arsenal with its docks, building slips, &c., is com-

pleted the maritime power of Russia will be much enhanced; she will be able to enter the lists at any time of the year. She will then not only have "a window overlooking Europe," as Peter the Great demanded when he wanted to drive the Swedes out of Finland, but a real doorway by which she can leave whenever she wishes. On that day it will be possible to count with certainty on her action in the North when the movements of her squadrons is no longer subject to the caprice of the seasons.

It is an incontestable axiom that war in the future will proceed by rapid and decisive blows. So efforts are made in all navies to assure the prompt readiness for action of the fleets, above all of the fleets of the first line. This readiness for action is a quality of such first importance that I might mention a certain navy of the Triple Alliance which, in spite of the excellence of its material, remains in a state of manifest inferiority, because the means have not been found of concentrating rapidly in its ports the personnel necessary to commission fully the powerful and fast ships of its first line.

In this respect the Russian Navy is favourably situated. In order to place the first and second lines of the Baltic fleets on a war footing, 10,000 men are required, and 3,500 men for the same purpose in the Black Sea. But, in the groups of personnel organized in the ports, under the name of "équipages," there are now in the Baltic, 18,000 men—not including the "équipage de la Garde," which numbers 2,000 men,—and 6,000 men in the Black Sea. There is, therefore, a considerable margin over the numbers necessary for completing the personnel of the ships which have been classed under the heading of fighting ships.

All the details and preceding considerations refer only to squadron warfare. If circumstances compel Russia to enter upon a cruiser warfare, it is necessary to admit that the number of cruisers capable of preying upon the merchant ships of the enemy will be much reduced. Among the vessels, which are neither armoured or protected, we find that the speed only averages between 12 and 14 knots, which makes them quite incapable of chasing 15- or 16-knot mail boats, which are not the most rapid of the commercial fleets.

It goes without saying that a certain number of fast mail boats could be requisitioned in time of war, to serve as auxiliary cruisers against an enemy's commerce. Russia possesses an organization peculiar to itself (there being nothing similar to it in other countries), which assures to it, in case of need, some excellent auxiliary cruisers. This institution is its volunteer or patriotic fleet, the creation of which dates back to the preliminaries of the treaty of Berlin, when it was feared that England would declare war with Russia. A national subscription, headed by the name of the Hereditary Grand Duke (the present Czar) collected in a few days so important a sum as to enable them to acquire seven mail steamers.

This volunteer fleet has for its duty the transportation of matériel and personnel of the State between Odessa, Vladivostock, and

Saghaliën; and is subsidized by the Government; moreover it has the privilege of manning its mail boats by officers and men belonging to the list of the Imperial navy. It is, therefore, in a measure a mixed fleet, half-merchant and half-naval. But in spite of these intimate bonds with the State, it preserves a character of private industry. It trades with all the ports situated on its route, and has acquired the first place as importer of tea from China. Its profits are now considerable.

Encouraged by the excellent results that have followed, the Russian Government have decided that the special fleet shall be notably augmented; to the seven ships they had, two new ones have already been added, and shortly their number will be increased by eleven other vessels, which will steam 20 knots, and which, constructed with a view of being eventually used as war ships, will be able at a short notice to be transformed into auxiliary cruisers as soon as the political horizon assumes a dark outlook.

This survey of the Russian Navy would be incomplete if we did not speak of the military ports of Russia. They are 12 in number: five of the first class, Cronstadt, St. Petersburg, Nicolaïef, Sebastopol, Vladivostock; and seven of the second class—Swæborg, Revel, Archangel, Baku, Batoum, Nicolaïefsk (on the river Amour), Kagala (on the Oxus). Lastly, quite recently the port of Libau was inaugurated as a fortified harbour with an *éclat* which proves the importance of this new maritime centre.

The Russian harbours are for the most part very strongly fortified. The coast defence of the Baltic is under organization. On this sea (the difficult access to whose coast forms a natural defence) the places most strongly fortified are Dünamünde, Cronstadt, Wiborg, and Swæborg. Cronstadt is impregnable. We proved this ourselves in 1854 and 1855. We were unable to do anything against the place, and at the present moment with its cross-fire and armoured forts overlooking a narrow, winding canal, 29 kilomètres in length, Cronstadt can defy all bombardment. In the Black Sea, Sebastopol has been newly fortified. Kertch and Yenikalé are also strong; Nicolaïeff, Kinburn, Otchakoff are surrounded by numerous defensive works; Azov, Batoum, and Poti are being provided with heavy guns.

The ships of the Russian Navy are built at St. Petersburg, either at the Works of the New Admiralty, or at the Baltic Works, which latter although a private yard, is fast becoming the entire property of the State. In Finland, at Abo, the navy possesses an important yard for the construction of small ships and good torpedo-boats. At Cronstadt there are only shops for repairing and fitting out; but on the other hand, at Nicolaïef, there are the Imperial building yards of the first importance.

The private yards build also for the navy. Amongst the most active are the Franco-Russian Works, which are altogether French and which have built battle-ships and cruisers, amongst others the "Emperor Nicolas" and the "Rynda," which are now in Admiral

Avellan's squadron, and also the works of the Black Sea Company, situated at Sebastopol. Besides the works on the Neva, the Pontiloff and Tjora yards frequently execute orders for the State.

The Russian Government has occasionally applied to the French workyards; the cruiser "Admiral Korniloff," one of the best of the Russian ships, was built at the Loire building yard, and a large number of torpedo-boats were ordered from M. Normand, the constructor at Havre. Other torpedo-boats come from the "Schichau" yards in Germany, who turn out excellent work. One must not draw any unfavourable conclusion as to Russian industry on account of these dealings with strange building yards. In effecting them the Government of the Czar simply wished to acquire models, either to reproduce or imitate. But the Russian building yards are in perfect working condition (although the cost of production is relatively high); the ships launched by them will bear comparison with those of the first navies in the world. A last detail will finish the characterization of the progress of Russian industry. Until within the last few years the navy was indebted to the Krupp Works for their artillery matériel, now they turn out their own guns at the national works of Oboukhoff, and these are excellent.

Such is the navy of Russia. There are not yet a sufficient number of ships nor an efficient reserve, but an immediate future will provide them. She is, in fact, in a state of rapid development. If she follows the movements of foreign navies, and profits by the innovations and perfections realized by them, she is still far from wanting in the initiative. She was the first in 1855, during the Crimean War, to use torpedoes, which were then called Jacobis, from the name of their inventor, one of which did vast damage to the English ship "Merlin." She was one of the first to build monitors for her squadrons. She studded her coasts in good time with armoured forts. She was very nearly the initiator in the employment of "torpilleurs-de-haute-mer." Lastly, quite recently she took the lead in building cruisers of a great tonnage, which will perhaps be one of the greatest features in the naval warfare of the future.

This vitality is undeniably a sign of great force. In this century of incessant conquests of industry and science, a navy, to increase, must go with the times. This is what the Russian Navy is doing.

However, even with matériel of the first order, even with a fleet powerfully armed, combining force, protection, and speed, these three primary factors of modern warfare, a navy cannot be certain of fulfilling the high destinies for which it has been prepared.

"Tant vaut l'homme, tant vaut la terre," is the saying of peasants; "Tant vaut l'homme, tant vaut la flotte," sailors may say.

In Russia a sailor has not as much practical exercise in his profession as one could wish. Taken from his village in the interior of the Empire, he is often only a soldier living in barracks during the greater part of the year, and serving at sea for only a few months when the Baltic Squadron is commissioned after the breaking up of

the ice. He is trained in military exercises, but the feelings of a sailor, which can only come by being accustomed to the sea, are generally wanting. It remains, however, to be seen, on these modern ships where all trace of sail has disappeared and everything is sacrificed to the machinery for fighting the ship, whether the Russian sailor may not prove sufficiently efficient. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that the conditions will be much changed with the opening out of the port of Libau. There will not be seen, as there were at Cronstadt, numbers of ships abandoned during the six months of winter. Thanks to the future arsenal, which will become the principal station for the Baltic fleet, and which is in reality the future of the Russian Navy, the sailors will get the constant practice afloat which they have wanted so much up to the present time.

The officers, on the other hand, have always found in the course of their career plenty of occasions for practising navigation, and for acquiring the necessary nautical knowledge and experience. They merit the epithet of seamen, which, in the language of our sailors, includes all the indispensable qualities. They are, moreover, well instructed in everything which concerns the different branches of their profession.

We can render complete homage to the courage of both officers and men. We know, moreover, since the glorious defence of Sebastopol, how to value their energy. Courage and heroism are traditions with them. They have proved this once again in their exploits during the last war with Turkey.