

THE RISE OF RUSSIAN SEA POWER

By Col J. D. Hittle

THE NON-COMMUNIST WORLD has developed a high sensitivity to domestic and international actions of the Soviet Union. In particular, Russian military acts and policies are the subject of exhaustive examination and evaluation by the press and government agencies. The astounding expansion of the Communist realm since the end of WWII has sensitized and alerted the United States, as well as most of the Free World, to every new development

in Soviet military policy and strategy.

Yet, in spite of this sensitivity and alertness to changes in the Russian military posture, the Free World has, in large measure, let pass unheeded what probably is the most fundamental and potentially dangerous Soviet development since WWII—the emergence of Russia as one of the great sea powers.

Viewed in terms of its strategic implications, both with respect to Russian policy and US national

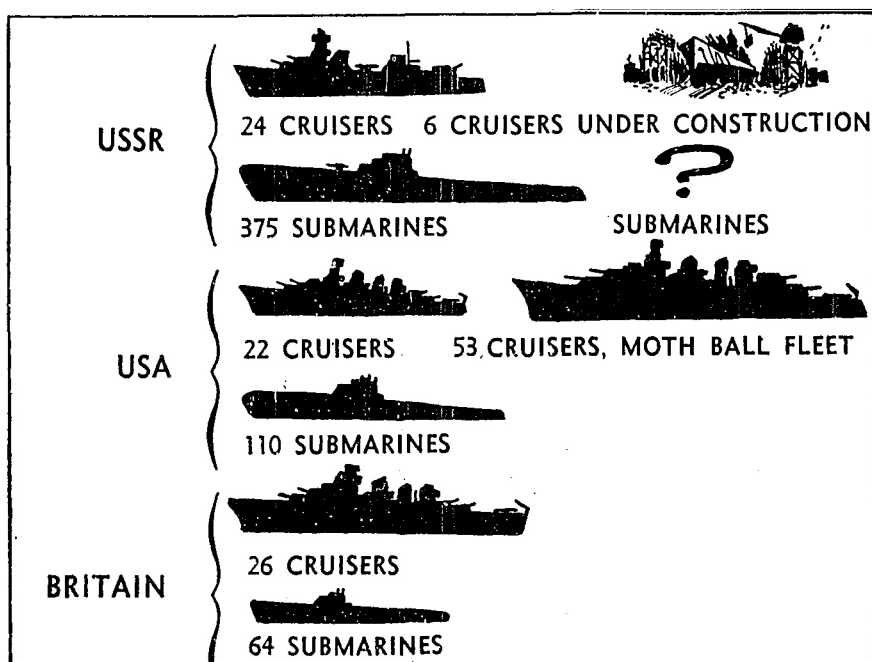
security, the rise of Russian sea power may well be the most important single development in the vast and continuing East-West conflict.

The really amazing thing is not that the Kremlin has become a leading sea power, but rather that this historic development has failed to achieve the attention and generate the alarm it deserves in the Western World. The frequently heard disclaimer, "Why do we need a Navy when Russia doesn't have one?" is accurately reflective of the too prevalent ignorance of, or indifference to, the burgeoning Russian sea power that is even now upsetting basic East-West power relationships.

This rise of Russian sea power is no mere matter of speculation. It is a fact. The Soviet Union's entry into the global sea power arena has already resulted in historic power shifts. Ten years ago England was the world's first ranking sea power. The United States was second. Russia was seventh.

Today the United States is the first sea power. Russia numerically is second. England is third. Viewed in historical perspective the implications of this strategic realignment challenge the imagination.

From the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 until WWII, England ruled the seas. With WWII



England passed this sea power primacy to the United States. As long as the two greatest sea powers were the US and England, a virtual sea power monopoly (and all the global freedom of movement that the term implies) was vested with the West. Now England reverts to third place in numerical navy strength among the powers, giving way to Russia.

The impact of this revolutionary change in the world strategic picture is even now being felt. Admiral Robert B. Carney, the retiring CNO, has publicly warned that "we no longer have a monopoly on strength at sea in the Pacific."

Admiral Carney's statement assumes even greater significance when it is recalled that one of the prime reasons we went to war with Japan was that US national security could not permit our sea power primacy in the Pacific to be challenged by Japan. Great events are coming fast in the 20th Century. It is not too early to speculate on the possibility that Russia's hammer and sickle has supplanted Japan's rising sun as the challenger of US sea power domination in the Pacific basin.

The recent appearance of what was authoritatively described as a "very sizeable" Russian fleet in North European waters is a harbinger of strategic complications in the Atlantic. The fact that the Soviet Union's naval capability has been able to alter so drastically the global sea power picture in so short a time leads to the question of the strength of the Russian Navy.

Russian cruiser strength is particularly interesting. According to *Janes Fighting Ships 1954-1955*, Russia has a total of 24 modern cruisers with 6 of the *Sverdlov* class under construction. At the present time the United States has in operation about 22 cruisers of various types. England has a total of 24 cruisers. These figures disclose Russia slightly ahead of the United States in cruisers in operation. However, overall cruiser superiority for the present and at least the near future would seem to rest with the United States, which has, in addition to operational cruisers, about 53 in reserve status.

Russian destroyers total 125, of which 50 are large fleet destroyers



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The Soviet Union *does* have a naval tradition to draw upon.

A century before Alfred built the first English warships, the Russians were fighting desperate sea battles

completed since WWII.

Soviet submarine strength is particularly impressive, the estimated total being 375. This is more than triple the submarine strength of the US Navy. Close to half of the Russian subs are long range types capable of attacking merchant shipping or conducting mine laying. There is much to ponder in the fact that the present Russian submarine fleet, the world's largest, is 8 times as large as Germany's at the start of WWII!

Most significant discrepancy, by US standards, exists in aircraft carriers. The Soviet Navy has, at present, no carriers. While this would appear to be a serious void in the Soviet fleet structure, the lack of carriers may well be the result of a deliberate policy rather than a planning oversight. As will be noted later, the architects of Soviet naval power may be designing the fleet for a mission that does not, in their opinion, create an imperative need for carriers. Furthermore, absence of carriers does not indicate commensurate numerical weakness in naval aircraft. Russian land-based naval aviation totals some 3,000 planes. This includes jet fighters and jet light bombers. By way of comparison, the Soviet naval air arm almost equals the total air strength of Germany at the beginning of WWII.

The actual in-being strength of the Soviet Navy is of major strategic importance. Yet, the significance of current Russian sea strength is far surpassed by the rapidity at which the present totals are being augmented by new construction. For instance, the Russian building program in cruisers and destroyers is larger than that of the combined Western navies. The extent to which Russian naval strength will increase in the next few years is indicated by the fact that the Soviet Union is believed to be engaged in a construction program capable of providing, in the next two or three years, a total of 30 cruisers, 150 destroyers and 500 submarines.

When this rapid buildup of the Soviet fleet is compared with the relatively small US naval construction program and the impending "bloc obsolescence" of major elements of our Navy, it becomes in-

creasingly apparent that, from the standpoint of numbers, present American naval supremacy is no permanent certainty. It is also clear that while the US now enjoys a significant margin of naval superiority over the Soviet Union, Russia is narrowing that margin at a perceptible and significant rate.

It is, of course, wrong to base any comparison of naval strengths solely on ships alone. As naval history has repeatedly demonstrated it is more often the *men* and not the *ships* that tip the scale of victory in combat. Consequently, any evaluation of the relative strength of Soviet and western naval power must include consideration of a nation's sea-going traditions, a prime, if intangible, attribute of sea power.

Just as the frequent assertion, "Russia has no navy," reflects an unawareness of the current facts, the oft-stated belief that "Russia has no naval traditions" reflects an unawareness of Russian history. While Russia does not have the kind of naval tradition with which England or the US are blessed, she does possess a long significant naval history

which, although it includes disasters, debacles and downright inefficiency, also includes victories and heroic acts from which a meaningful naval tradition could be derived.

Like so many things Russian, the history of the Russian Navy is not well known in this country. This is unfortunate. For the Navy, like almost all major aspects of Soviet activity, is to a large degree the product of a long historical process that was not terminated by the 1917 Revolution. The Soviet Union does not hesitate to draw on the Imperial military history for tradition and inspiration for her armed forces.

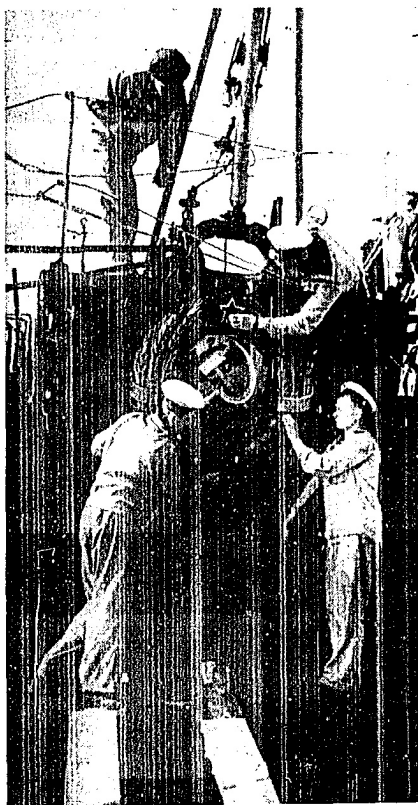
A complete review of Russian naval history is not possible within the space limitations of this article. However, a survey of the salient features of Russian naval history may be useful in providing the basis for a better understanding of the nature and role of the fast growing Russian Navy that is even now posing a new and growing threat to the security of the Free World.

Peter the Great who, more than any other individual, set Russia on its course to national greatness, is generally recognized as the founder of the Russian Navy. However, the roots of Russian naval tradition extend back to the very beginning of the Russian nation.

From the historical standpoint there is good justification for stating that the Russian Navy outdates England's fleets.

The naval historian, Fred T. Jane, emphasized the early origin of the Russian Navy by pointing out that, "A century before Alfred built the first English warships, Russians had fought desperate sea fights, and a thousand years ago the foremost sailors of the time were Russians."

There was a reason why the then youthful Russian nation should have sea-going attributes. The foundation of the Russian Empire is generally regarded as taking place in the latter 9th Century AD. There should be some significance, from the standpoint of naval history, that the early Russian state was under the rule of the Varangian kings. These Varangians who governed the nascent Russian nation were Vikings, and true to the Viking tradition, their power rested, in large measure, on their ability to dominate the vital north-



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Russian naval tradition didn't stop with the 1917 Revolution

south waterway now known as the Dnieper River. The Dnieper, long referred to as the "Varangian Road," was the water highway that dominated the early history of Russia, and which in turn was dominated by the Varangians. The Varangians who ruled early Russia were true to the warlike tradition of the Vikings. Perhaps quite appropriately, therefore, it was these Vikings who made the first contribution to Russian naval history by attacking Constantinople in 865. The 200 galley-type vessels comprising the Russian fleet successfully passed the Bosphorus and effected landings, laying waste the countryside around Constantinople.

The success was short lived, for the Byzantine Emperor, Michael III, returning hurriedly from an expedition against the Saracens, put to sea with his fleet and destroyed the invading Russians. Although ending in disaster, that first Russian naval expedition did many things. It marked the beginning of Russian naval history and it underlined the sea-faring character of the first Russian regime. The fleet was destroyed — an inauspicious start of a nation's naval history — but the Russian nation did not die, nor did its Varangian rulers weaken in their determination to conquer Constantinople.

With unflagging determination the youthful Russian nation conducted a second expedition against Constantinople in 907. This ended in a negotiated trade treaty that was observed until 941 when a new expedition, reportedly numbering over 1,000 vessels, sailed against Constantinople. The Viking tradition may have been on the side of the Russians, but the scientific advancement of that time was on the side of the Byzantines who employed Greek fire to destroy the Russian fleet. For almost 100 years Russia abstained from conducting a sea-borne attack against Constantinople. However, in 1043 another expedition was launched, and its fate was the same as its predecessor. It was destroyed by Greek fire.

This ended early Russian efforts against Constantinople. The successive attempts to capture Constantinople by sea reflected the traditional sea-faring temperament of the Varangian rulers of Russia.

Furthermore, it would appear that the rulers' sea-faring spirit began to



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Vikings — founders of the Russian naval tradition

take hold in a limited sense, for it is recorded that in the early Varangian period the Russians enjoyed a good reputation as sailors and the Byzantines employed them at a "special and very high rate of pay." One result of these early sea expeditions was that Russia, at the dawn of her history as a nation, had her attention focused on the Black Sea and the city of Constantinople. This served to set a pattern that has persisted in Russian policy to the present moment. The Black Sea has been the scene of repeated naval actions, and Russia — Imperial and Communist — has never ceased striving for Constantinople. Today, as in the days of the Varangian kings, that city on the Bosphorus is a prime objective of Russian foreign policy.

After the defeat of her fleet in 1043 Russia lapsed into a prolonged era of naval inactivity. Increasing domestic conflict and growing emphasis on land power precluded any resurgence on the sea. Then in the early 13th Century, Mongol hordes came upon Russia and she became a

dominion of the Khans. Mongol domination turned Russia away from the sea and oriented her toward the landmass of inner Asia and the East.

Russia remained under the Mongol yoke until the latter 15th Century. Upon emerging from the long era of Mongol rule, Russia gradually turned her attention westward toward Europe and the sea. European orientation renewed an interest in naval matters. This interest was a logical result of the emphasis on European affairs, for Russia could not hope to participate in European power politics unless she possessed access to the sea. Furthermore, it did not take the Russian leaders long to realize that the long estrangement from the sea had placed Russia in an unenviable position in respect to Western sea power. Russia, upon emancipation from the Mongols, possessed no navy. More importantly, she was virtually devoid of nautical skills so utterly indispensable to any naval program.

The first step to rectify this vital shortcoming was taken by Michael, first of the new Romanov dynasty that was destined to rule Russia until the 1917 Revolution. At this early date, the period of 1620-40, England was the world's greatest sea power. Then, as now, Russian leadership was not slow to utilize the technical knowledge of the Western World. Accordingly, Michael imported British shipwrights and put them to work at Archangel, then the only Russian port for European trade.

The reconstruction of Russian sea power slowly gained impetus.

After Michael, during the reign of the able Tsar Alexis, father of Peter the Great, Russian policy was consciously and firmly oriented toward the dual objectives of a Baltic outlet and the creation of a fleet. This was the contribution of Alexis' great minister, Ordyn-Nashchakin, whom Russian historians recognize as one of the only real statesman-ministers of the Imperial era. In setting the Baltic policy, and emphasizing the need for a fleet, Ordyn-Nashchakin fashioned the beginnings of the program that was to be so vigorously pursued by Peter the Great.

To Peter the Great must be accorded full credit for creating Russian naval power. To appreciate his obstacles and his accomplishment it is necessary to recall the strategic position of Russia when Peter came to power: the Baltic was virtually a Swedish lake. In the south, the Black Sea was completely dominated by the Turkish fleets. With the exception of the arctic port of Archangel, Russia was land-locked, sealed off from the sea.

Initially, Peter turned his attention toward the Turks, the traditional enemies of the earlier Varangian kings. Seeking the historic Russian goal of open water in the south, Peter, in 1695, initiated a campaign against the Turkish fortress of Azov, on the lower Don. This expedition gave Peter an early lesson in sea power, for he discovered that although he could command the land approaches, he could not capture the fortress as long as the Turks enjoyed control of the sea, by which Azov was supported and supplied. Sensing the futility of his efforts, he withdrew. React-



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Peter I—A window on the sea

ing with his customary vigor, he procured European naval technicians and soon launched a naval construction program on the banks of the Don. Then, with his hastily built flotilla of nearly 200 craft, he gained control of the sea approaches to Azov, blockaded it, and took it by combined action of his forces in the following year.

While it would be incorrect to draw too strong a conclusion from Peter's Azov campaign, it is worth noting that from his first naval operation there seems to emerge the genesis of a basic concept that even today constitutes the salient doctrinal concept of Soviet naval thinking: that a prime purpose of naval power is to protect the sea flank of

land forces and assist those forces in taking the land objectives. That was precisely the manner in which Peter, the founder of the Russian Navy, used his first naval force. As will be noted later, the basic operational mission of the Soviet fleet is to serve as an auxiliary of her land forces.

Convinced that Russia must become a leading naval power, Peter, traveling incognito, departed on his famous tour of Europe. In the course of his tour of Europe he visited and closely studied shipbuilding techniques in British and Dutch ports.

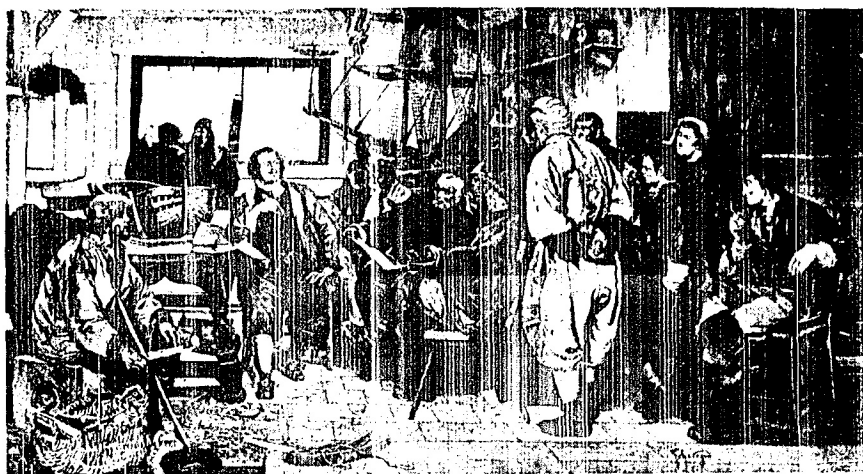
Returning to Russia, he turned his attention to the Baltic, then controlled by Swedish sea power. Peter realized full well that he would have to subdue the Swedish fleet to control the Baltic—no small task for a Russia which by Western European standards did not even possess a navy. Her naval craft were primarily of the galley-type for use in coastal or inland waters.

There probably is no greater testament to the genius of Peter than the manner in which he created and used Russian sea power in the titanic struggle with Sweden for control of the Baltic and its littoral.

At the outset of hostilities, Peter's army suffered at Narva (19 November 1700) a crushing defeat at the hands of Charles XII of Sweden. Undismayed by disasters, Peter began rebuilding his army, and at the same time was aggressively pushing naval construction. Naval combat began on a small scale in 1702 with a Swedish victory over a Russian

Peter in Holland—he was not reluctant to import what he needed

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flotilla consisting of 4-gun galleys and large row boats. Peter, however, persisted in his policy, and by 1703, through shrewd employment of his now growing naval forces he gained control of Lake Ladoga and the Neva River. In that same year he founded, on the banks of the Neva, the city of St. Petersburg. This was to be Russia's "window to the west." It was also to be the base of Peter's new sea power. There, under direction of imported naval architects, he began construction of sea-going naval ships.

One of the prime ingredients of naval power which Peter lacked was Russian naval design and shipbuilding knowledge. Peter was not reluctant to import that which he needed. Consequently, he secured in Western Europe, principally from England, the naval architects and shipwrights to provide the kind of indispensable technical knowledge that simply did not exist in Russia at that time.

Among the first brought to Russia by Peter were the British master shipbuilders Bent and Browne. Under them some of the largest ships of Peter's navy were built. Even so, the talented Peter himself had a hand in designing them, some of which mounted up to 54 guns. By obtaining the services of trained British ship designers and builders, he utilized British nautical knowledge as the technical foundation for the navy he knew was so utterly necessary to the accomplishment of his plan for making Russia a great power.

Russia of Peter's time was almost as destitute of naval commanders as it was of naval builders. Not only did Peter have to import foreigners to build his ships, but he also had to import a large number of high-ranking officers to command them. Many of the imported officers did not distinguish themselves in the Russian service. This, of course, is understandable, for many of them were available for Russian employment as a result of dismissal from their former commands. For good reason, Peter the Great must have on occasion questioned even his own policy of recruiting foreign and principally British and Scotch naval commanders. A British captain lost his ship at Kronstadt, another grounded the *London* by faulty

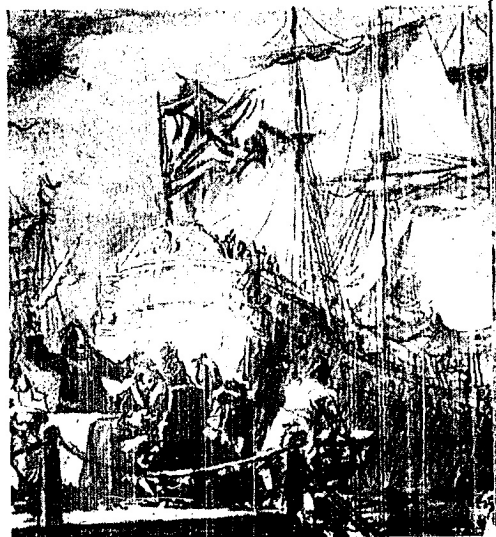
navigation, for which Peter reduced him to junior lieutenant in the galley fleet. Others were court-martialed, but even so, there were many foreigners who rendered able service.

Admiral Fedor Apraksin (1671-1728), the "first Russian Admiral" and the one person to whom Peter would subordinate himself, emerges as the one professionally competent Russian fleet commander of Peter's era. His ability is reflected in the fact that he was the only Russian admiral of his time praised by the British. A member of the old nobility, he seems to have possessed high professional ability and strong attributes of leadership.

In addition, he was a man of independent mind, and is reported to have frequently differed violently with Peter on naval matters. Yet, he was devoted to the Tsar, who valued his candidness. Certainly, not the least of his accomplishments was his ability to exert some control over the undisciplined foreign officers in the Russian fleet. It was Apraksin who directed the capture of Viborg in 1710 and who directed operations along the Finnish coast in 1713. He commanded the Russian fleet that defeated the Swedes at Gangoot in 1714. Five years later he conducted the naval campaign against the Swedish coast, an expedition that included major landings and hastened the final capitulation of Sweden. Unquestionably, Adm Apraksin had set a high standard for those who were to follow him in the Russian Navy. But, as history shows, Russia provided far too few admirals who measured up to the example set by Apraksin.

It was not mere accident that the success of Peter's Baltic policy was paralleled by the rising power of the Russian fleet.

In 1709 Peter crushed the army of Charles XII in the Battle of Poltava. From this point on, Swedish and Russian sea power played an increasingly more important role in the Baltic struggle. In May of 1713, Peter began his campaign for the northern littoral of the Baltic. In command of the Russian fleet was Apraksin. Peter the Great designated himself as second in command, officially listing himself, not as Tsar, but as a rear admiral. The campaign proceeded successfully



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St. Petersburg: new seapower



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Poltava: Swedes driven out



Bettmann

Gangoot: Peter swept the Baltic

and the Russians soon were in control of southern Finland.

By 1714 the Russian fleet, with Peter aboard, gained a signal victory over the Swedish fleet at Hango-Udd. Peter was so satisfied with the action that, in announcing the victory, he promoted himself to vice admiral.

By this time the Russian Navy had achieved respectable size, even by Western European standards. Jane states that in 1715 the Russians had thirty 80-gun ships in Baltic waters.

A dramatic page in Russian naval history was written in May of 1719 when five 50-gun ships engaged a force of Sweden's Baltic fleet. The running sea battle ended in a Russian victory when the largest Swedish ship, a 48-gun two-decker, was forced to strike. This was probably the first Russian victory in a sea battle in which only large Russian ships were engaged. Previous battles had included galleys and other smaller vessels.

Peter continued to apply his sea power relentlessly and astutely. Between 1719 and 1721 Russia conducted three major campaigns against the Swedish coast. It was evident that the Russian fleet dominated the Baltic. Sweden sued for peace, which was concluded at Nystadt in 1721. In slightly over two decades Peter, starting from virtually zero, had built a fleet that converted the Baltic from a Swedish to a Russian lake. Unquestionably, seizure of the Baltic by Peter amounts to one of the most amazing one-man achievements in the history of sea power. A nation such as Soviet Russia, possessing demonstrated propaganda abilities, should be able to discover considerable naval tradition in the sea power policy and naval actions of the Petrine period.

There were, however, aspects of Peter the Great's navy that Soviet propagandists would not emphasize. For instance, Peter realized he did not have seasoned crews such as manned British or even Swedish ships. Consequently, he issued a standing order that his ships would not engage the Swedes unless the Russians were one-third stronger. Considering the caliber of his captains and crews, such an order established Peter as one of the great realists of his time.



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Catherine: the Navy, her scepter

No events of major import characterized Russian naval history from the death of Peter the Great (1725) to the beginning of the reign of Catherine the Great (1760).

Catherine, like Peter, realized that participation in European power politics required naval power. With good reason it can be said that she guided Russia to a position of power and prestige it never before enjoyed. In so doing she continued the strong sea power policies of Peter. In a sense, the reign of Catherine the Great gave substance to the theory that Russian emphasis on naval power was—and is—an indicator of the vigor and strength of a Russian foreign policy.

Because Catherine was the beneficiary of a naval system created by Peter, she was able to bring the Russian Navy to a greater position of efficiency and effectiveness. In so doing she followed Peter's policy of employing foreign naval officers. In this she enjoyed far better results than did Peter. The same problems existed in Catherine's navy, but to a far lesser extent.

Some foreign officers of the Russian Navy, under Catherine's rule, deserve a high place among the makers of Russian naval history. The extent of Catherine's reliance on foreign trained naval officers was illustrated by the fact that at one time more than half of her entire list of naval officers were of Anglo-Saxon and Celtic nationality. From the standpoint of higher naval commanders, the navy of Catherine the Great, like that of Peter the Great, was a British product. However, the list of foreign officers in the Russian

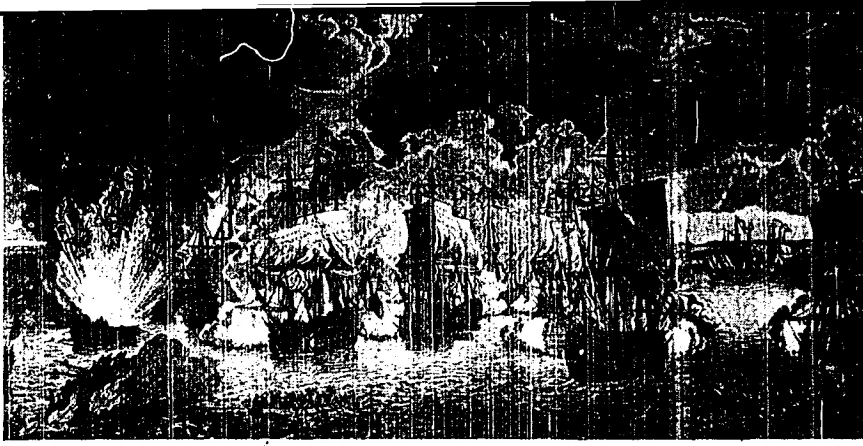
Navy was not limited to the British. It included other Europeans, and also an American, John Paul Jones.

After the American Revolution, Jones, destined to be one of the great and revered figures of US naval history, entered the Russian service as a rear admiral. His enthusiasm soon gave way to disenchantment as he was incessantly frustrated by duplicity and intrigue. In spite of such handicaps he demonstrated his professional ability in playing the principal naval command role in the Russian victory over the Turks at Kinburn.

At virtually the outset of her reign, Catherine used her navy to support her foreign policy. She declared war against Turkey in 1768 and in 1769 Orlov's Baltic fleet was ordered to the Mediterranean, an historic development in Russian naval history. This marked the first time the Russian fleet was to push out of the Baltic into the Atlantic and southern waters. The very thought of Russian sea power in their midst filled the Mediterranean powers with apprehension; and for good reason. For centuries European-Mediterranean policy had been directed toward keeping Russian sea power from flooding out of the Black Sea through the Dardanelles and Bosphorus into the Mediterranean world. Under Catherine, control of the Baltic meant access to the high seas. Thus, through sea power, Russia was able to reach the Mediterranean world, long the objective of Russian policy, via Gibraltar rather than through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles.

The climax of Russian fleet operations in the Mediterranean came in July of 1770 when Russian ships, under Adm Spiridov, engaged and almost destroyed the Turkish fleet in the Bay of Tchesma. Although Spiridov was in nominal command, the scheme of action was that of RAdm Elphinstone, a British officer in Russian service. After Tchesma Elphinstone proceeded to blockade the Dardanelles. This in itself was an event worthy of historical note, for, by use of sea power's mobility, Russia was actually approaching the Straits from the west!

Russia was then on the threshold of seizing Constantinople, her historic objective. Elphinstone urged Admiral Orlov, in command of that



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Tchesma — had victory been exploited, history might have changed

portion of the fleet, to exploit the opportunity by forcing the Dardanelles, which at the time were protected only by deteriorated fortifications. At this moment of history a strange event was indeed transpiring: a Russian fleet was threatening Constantinople from the west; the Straits were virtually undefended; a British admiral — of all people — was urging that the Russian fleet attack; Orlov, the Russian admiral in command, hesitated, doubtful — and wrongfully so — that the defenses were as impotent as Elphinstone contended. While Orlov hesitated, the Turks whitewashed the old forts. Thus, when Orlov arrived to make his reconnaissance, he saw what seemed to be new fortifications. Before Orlov realized his error, the Turks, under the French engineer, De Tott, constructed new and effective forts, which were able to repulse a limited attack by Orlov. After this half-hearted effort he abandoned the Dardanelles, and sailed westward toward the island of Lemnos. So ended a crucial moment of history when Russian sea power could probably have had Constantinople for the taking.

Speculating on the "ifs" of history is at best a dubious procedure. Yet, one is tempted to imagine how history would have been changed if Orlov had not rejected Elphinstone's advice, and if at that critical moment the Turks had not whitewashed the tumbledown forts. By such a combination of hesitation and whitewash Russia, in 1770, was thwarted from her historic goal and a momentous change in the course of history was avoided.

Indecisive action between the two fleets continued. Orlov's landing at Lemnos was thrown back by a bold

Turkish counter-landing. This was followed by a hard-fought battle at Mouderos, with both fleets claiming victory.

Although Russia missed her moment of historic opportunity as Orlov hesitated at the Straits, the Russian effort in the Mediterranean was not meaningless. It had forced a diversion of Turkish forces on the southern Russian frontier, thus assisting the Russian land offensive in the Crimea. Unquestionably, Russian sea power made a major contribution to the Empire's gains which were confirmed by the Russian-Turkish Peace of Kainardji, in 1784.

In 1788 Catherine, pressing a strong Baltic policy, declared war against Sweden. Major hostilities began when the Swedish fleet, aimed at St. Petersburg, entered the Gulf of Finland. The Russian fleet (including 108-gun vessels), engaged the Swedish force at Hogland and turned the enemy back short of St. Petersburg.

This and subsequent action was but a prelude to the fierce battle that began off Revel on 3 June 1790. This was no small meeting engagement. The principal elements of the Russian and Swedish navies in the Baltic were to be involved before it ended.

Prince Carl of Sweden (21 ships, up to 74 guns, plus frigates) met Kruse's Kronstadt division of the Russian fleet (17 ships, up to 108 guns) off Revel. A bitter all-day battle ensued, and the next day Adm Tchitshagov with 13 ships and 11 frigates joined up, forcing the Swedes to withdraw to Viborg. There the Russians blockaded the Swedish fleet for almost a month.

Short on supplies, the Swedish fleet attempted to run the blockade.

A rough and confused engagement resulted in Russian destruction of the bulk of the Swedish ships-of-the-line. So decisive was this Russian victory that Jane described it as being the equivalent to a Trafalgar of the Baltic, assuring Russia primacy in that highly strategic inland sea.

When Catherine died in 1796 Russian sea power had again become a potent force in European affairs. According to Jane, Russia "was then the second naval power in the world." Coming from a naval historian of the stature of Fred T. Jane, such an evaluation cannot be taken lightly. Furthermore, such a statement has meaning in terms of today's events.

Today Communist Russia is employing sea power for much the same reasons as did Imperial Russia under Peter and Catherine the Great: control of the Baltic, pressure against the Turks in the Black Sea. Yet, both Catherine and the current Communist rulers surpassed Peter in naval policy matters by utilizing Russian sea power as a symbol of Russian power in foreign waters. Catherine pushed her fleet out of the Baltic through the Atlantic and into the Mediterranean. Today, Soviet sea power, with its growing merchant fleet and increasing number of cruisers, submarines and destroyers is no longer bound to the Baltic and Black Seas, but is intent on showing the Soviet Russian flag in the ports of the world.

This presently increasing Soviet Navy, as the Russian successor to the Imperial Navy, can point to some meaningful Russian naval history written by the fleets of Catherine the Great. Past victories are the prime ingredients of any nation's naval traditions. Catherine's navy had its reverses and its inefficiency, but it also had its victories. Tchesma and Viborg were important Imperial bequests to the naval tradition of Russia. Proof that Communist Russia recognizes and exploits the tradition passed down from the Imperial Navy of Catherine the Great is readily apparent: the victory at Viborg is today being perpetuated by Soviet Russia's leaders who have given that name to a coastal defense ship of the Russian Navy. US & MC

(To be concluded next month)