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ПОДДЕРЖКА ФЛОТОМ НАСТУПЛЕНИЯ АРМИИ НА КАВКАЗСКОМ ФРОНТЕ В 1916 году

Павлов Андрей Юрьевич — профессор Санкт-Петербургского государственного университета (Санкт-Петербург, Россия).

E-mail: a.y.pavlov@spbu.ru

Scopus Author ID: 57220813403; ORCID: 0000-0002-1095-4022

Аннотация. В статье на основе материалов Российского государственного архива военно-морского флота, Российского государственного военно-исторического архива рассматривается взаимодействие Черноморского флота с Кавказской армией. Последняя успешно наступала на Эрзерум и в начале февраля 1916 г. овладела им. В том же месяце 1916 г. на правом фланге Кавказской армии начал наступление вдоль побережья Черного моря отряд под командованием генерала Ляхова. Этот относительно небольшой по численности отряд имел серьезное преимущество перед другими. Продвигаясь вдоль побережья, он мог рассчитывать на помощь со стороны российского Черноморского флота. Довольно быстро стало понятно, что успех наступления будет зависеть именно от эффективности действий Черноморского флота по оказанию всесторонней поддержки сухопутным силам. Отсутствие удобных сухопутных коммуникаций поставило Приморский отряд в зависимость от подвоза всего необходимого морем. Флот обеспечивал артиллерийскую поддержку, снабжение, а также создавал возможность обхода вражеских позиций посредством высадки войск в тылу врага. Данная ситуация представляет собой редкий для российских вооруженных сил периода Первой мировой войны пример успешного долгосрочного взаимодействия армии и флота. Несмотря на имевшиеся между армейскими и флотскими командными структурами разногласия, командование Черноморского флота смогло сформировать эффективную систему взаимодействия с Приморским отрядом, что стало залогом успеха наступательных операций сухопутных войск. В статье также рассмотрены формы и методы этого взаимодействия, ставшего основой успеха, продемонстрировано, как военная необходимость заставила морское и армейское командования преодолеть традиционное взаимное недоверие.

Ключевые слова: Черноморский флот, Кавказская армия, Трапезунд, Первая мировая война, Кавказский фронт.

A.Yu. Pavlov

Fleet Support to the Army Offensive on the Caucasus Front in 1916

Andrey Pavlov, Saint-Petersburg State University (Saint-Petersburg, Russia).

E-mail: a.y.pavlov@spbu.ru

Scopus Author ID: 57220813403; ORCID: 0000-0002-1095-4022

Abstract. At the beginning of 1916, the Caucasus was the only theatre of operations of the Great War from which good news for the Entente were coming. The Russian Caucasus Army successfully advanced on Erzurum and captured this Turkish fortress in early February. In February 1916, the forces of the Russian Caucasus Army's right flank group started an offensive along the southern coast of the Black Sea. It soon became clear that the main factor of its success will be naval support. Mountainous territory and the absence of roads made the Army entirely dependent on the Russian Navy. It provided the land forces with artillery support, logistics, communication and reconnaissance. Even tactical maneuvers were not possible without the Navy: the only way to envelop a Turkish defensive line was to land troops in its rear. The Russian Black Sea Fleet managed to establish an effective system of communication and coordination with the advancing army units, helping them reach their goals. This is one of not well-known examples of the dominant role of naval support in the success of the army offensive. In this article, the author examines the scope and forms of interaction between the Army and the Navy in order to demonstrate how the warfare conditions could force to overcome traditional mistrust and misunderstanding of the two Services.

Keywords: Black Sea Fleet, Caucasus Army, Trebizond, Great War, Caucasus Front.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of 1915, when the news of the withdrawal of Allied troops from Gallipoli became known, Russian commanders nervously awaited the possible transfer of the freed Turkish troops to the Caucasus. In order to deny Turks the opportunity to advance using the fresh forces, the headquarters of the Caucasus Army decided to get ahead of the enemy and take the strategic initiative in their own hands. The result of this decision was the beginning of a series of offensive operations in the Caucasus theatre of operations in the first half of 1916. The specificity of the Caucasus front, consisting mainly of a mountainous landscape that made it difficult to organize any offensive operations, as well as an underdeveloped communications network, forced the command of the Russian Caucasus Army to split their forces into several groups that were forced to operate almost independently from each other, moving along the available lines of communication. One of the groups commanded by general Vladimir Lyakhov was advancing along the Black Sea coast and was thus named: Coastal Group. It was this group that was soon almost completely dependent on the support of the Russian Black Sea fleet, and it was up to Lyakhov to build a relationship with the naval command.

OPERATIONS PLANNING

Forming the strategy of the campaign of 1916, the command of the Black Sea Fleet and the Russian Caucasus Army understood the necessity of cooperation, but built their plans separately, knowing that the final decision will be made in Stavka (Headquarter of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief). At the same time, the Army and the Navy needed each other to carry out their plans and exchanged opinions amidst the planning process. Both the Navy and the Army were aware of the dangers of the arrival to the Caucasus of Turkish troops, liberated after the withdrawal of Entente's forces from Gallipoli, and were considering different options. Headquarters of the Caucasus Army planned to launch an attack before the arrival of Turkish reinforcements, striking the main blow towards the Turkish fortress of Erzurum. The Coastal Group of Lyakhov was to advance along the coast, diverting the attention of some of the Turkish forces. Before the operation began, Commander of the Caucasus Army general Nikolai Yudenich, asked not only for direct support for the Coastal Group, but also for cooperation of the Fleet in another matter.

He suggested that the Commander of the Black Sea naval forces admiral Andrei Eberhardt use Russian supremacy at sea to begin regular strikes on the Turkish southern coast of the Black Sea, where laid one of the roads which the Turks used to transport troops to the Caucasus¹.

The headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet was considering its own options. Organizing regular naval strikes against the Turkish coast was, in the opinion of the naval staff, the worst course of action for the Fleet. It threatened to permanently divert the main naval forces from the main task – disruption of Turkish transportation communications in the western part of the Black Sea, the continuation of the blockade of Zonguldak coal regions and the elimination of the transportation of supplies to the Caucasus armies of the Turks². It was possible that certain circumstances leading to the activation of the enemy maritime forces could arise and Navy understood that something must be done³.

An alternative plan of action was being created at the headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet. They believed that the situation could be improved by capturing one of the Turkish ports on the southern coast of the Black Sea. Preparing to act against Bosphorus before the war, Russians were establishing naval bases in the western part of the Black Sea. On the eastern coast of the Caucasus such bases did not exist. The only military port and sea fortress was in Batumi, but even this port could not house and accommodate large naval forces, besides, it was too far from the most active regions of the Russian navy⁴. A port was needed that would allow the main naval forces to simultaneously support the Russian land force, block the Turkish coast and fight against the enemy fleet in the western part of the sea. According to the Black Sea Fleet headquarters estimates the Turkish port of Sinop could fit that role⁵. Its capture, however, was considered a promising target for the future, while the first step was proposed to be the acquisition of a small, but important point on the coast – port Trabzon⁶.

The Russian Supreme Command did not support Eberhardt's plan. The Chief of Staff of Russian Supreme Commander-in Chief general Mikhail Alekseev, was convinced that the outcome of the war will be decided in the European theater, on the French front and the Russian Western front, and the army cannot provide troops for secondary operations⁷. In December 1915 at the Inter-Allied Military Conference at Chantilly, the Allies agreed to organize a joint offensive on all fronts in 1916 and Alekseev needed all power for the embodiment of the general plan, the details of which were yet to be discussed⁸. In this regard, the main task of the Black Sea Fleet has remained the same – the blockade of the Turkish coast.

The command of the Caucasus Army had the same thoughts. On January 10, 1916 began the attack of the main forces of the Russian Caucasus Army on Erzurum. The Coastal direction was seen as secondary even in the Caucasus and general Yudenich was not going to send additional forces to join the group of Liakhov⁹. So far, nobody was planning on assigning Lyakhov the task of a long-term offensive along the coast.

COASTAL GROUP – “LIKE ON AN ISLAND”

The success of the offensive by the Russian Caucasus Army on Erzurum led to a change of the Coastal Group's goals. To strengthen the right flank of the Caucasus front, in late January

¹ Юденич – Эбергарду. 26 декабря 1916 г. // Российский государственный архив военно-морского флота (далее – РГА ВМФ). Ф. 609. Оп. 1. Д. 884. Л. 11.

² Козлов Д.С. Нарушение морских коммуникаций по опыту действий Российского флота в Первой мировой войне (1914–1917). М., 2012. С. 271.

³ Записка о действиях флота. Январь 1916 г. // РГА ВМФ. Ф. 609. Оп. 1. Д. 884. Л. 3.

⁴ Now – port in Georgia.

⁵ Первое приближение плана весенне-летней кампании 1916 г. Январь 1916 г. // РГА ВМФ. Ф. 609. Оп. 1. Д. 870. Л. 84.

⁶ Эбергард – Русину. 12 апреля 1916 г. // Там же. Д. 893. Л. 12.

⁷ Алексеев – Эбергарду. 16 января 1916 г. // Там же. Д. 884. Л. 60.

⁸ Алексеев – Жилинскому. 9 декабря 1916 г. // Российский государственный военно-исторический архив (далее – РГВИА). Ф. 2003. Оп. 1. Д. 1165. Л. 68.

⁹ Гончаров В. Действия Приморского отряда Кавказской армии. Трапезундская операция // Кавказский фронт Первой мировой войны. М., 2004. С. 667.

1916 general Liakhov was ordered to move to the Turkish port of Rize, located on the way to the port of Trabzon. Thus, the command of the Caucasus Army chose the worst plan of action for the Navy. As it turned out, gradual advancement of the land troops along the Black Sea coast required tremendous effort on behalf of the fleet, sustaining which required diverting the naval forces for long periods of time. The fleet was to provide the army unit, numbering about 15,000 people and 50 guns, with constant protection from the sea, artillery support and all necessary supplies. The Black Sea Fleet headquarters was urgently forced to strengthen small naval unit stationed in Batumi. To the two destroyers and one gunboat there, were added the old battleship "Rostislav", two destroyers and another gunboat. The Navy had allocated only older ships. They did not have to engage with the primary forces of the German-Turkish fleet and fit their supporting role well.

Initially, the navy Command suggested that the actions of ships would be limited to artillery support of the ground forces, helping break Turkish positions, after which the only course left for the ground army would be to pursue the enemy¹⁰. However, it turned out that things were not so simple. The terrain of the offensive region was mountainous, allowing to attack only along the coastal strip. In such circumstances it was easier to defend than to attack and the Turkish troops actively used that to their advantage by creating a series of well-fortified positions. Another advantage for the defenders, were numerous streams and rivers that crossed the coast and emptied into the sea. Upon breaking the initial Turkish defenses, there were no roads to be found for advancement and the Russian troops had to use the trails and rely primarily on assistance provided by the fleet. It soon became clear that even certain tactical tasks required the ground troops to enlist the help of the navy. Landing from the sea into the flank and the rear of the enemy was often the only alternative to a direct attack on the well-fortified positions. The more success the Coastal Group had in advancing and the further troops drifted away from their bases, the more they depended on the support of the fleet.

Black Sea Fleet command was forced to put up with the relocation of its forces for a long time as well as with the need to regularly provide additional combat and transport ships to support the advancing Russian troops. The command of the Russian Caucasus Army initially preferred to act through Stavka when requesting the aid from the Fleet¹¹. When Liakhov was ordered to advance on Trabzon, the order to support the offensive came directly to Eberhardt from Stavka. The headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet acted similarly.

The offensive of the Coastal Group was developing fairly well. Having overcome several Turkish defensive lines, at the beginning of March 1916 the Russians managed to capture port Rize. In this operation, the main roles were played by three amphibious operations during which the fleet landed infantry battalions behind the enemy lines. The emergence of Russian forces from the Turkish rear front forced them to abandon their position every time without much of a fight, so all Russians had to do was to pursue the Turks. Capturing Rize had special significance since this city had a small port. Although this port could not become a base for naval operations, its use greatly eased the process of supporting the troops of Liakhov. Further progress of Russians toward Trabzon required expanding the scale of naval operations. The assault on Trabzon in April 14-15 of 1916 was the most massive and successful operation in which naval forces played the most active part.

Disagreements between the Navy and Army commanders, especially in the first stage of the operation, sometimes led to difficulties. Despite this, the Black Sea Fleet Command was aware of its responsibility in front of the Army. Later, in April 1916, in one of his orders Eberhardt ordered his subordinates to be particularly attentive to the wishes of the army commanders, as troops of the Coastal Group "are like on an island", being totally dependent on naval support¹².

COORDINATION OF MISSION PLANS

The Fleet headquarters was naturally unhappy with the status quo. Regular requests by the Army to allocate ships to provide artillery support and transport troops were distracting the naval

¹⁰ Доклад Кетлинского. 28 января 1916 г. // РГА ВМФ. Ф. 609. Оп. 1. Д. 893. Л. 71.

¹¹ Там же.

¹² Приказ Эбергарда 14 апреля 1916 г. // Там же. Д. 894. Л. 27.

forces from their main task. The decision of the Caucasus Army Staff to advance along the coast “tied” the fleet to eastern part of the Black Sea. This in turn, weakened the blockade of the Turkish coal region and enabled the Turks to use submarines and cruisers¹³. Such turn of events caused discontent in Stavka. The Naval Department of Stavka demanded that admiral Eberhardt maintain the blockade of the Turkish coast and block the exit out of Bosphorus, which was something the Black Sea Fleet was unable to accomplish. A second rank captain Aleksandr Bubnov, serving at the time in Stavka, believed that the Black Sea Fleet commanders simply lacked decisiveness¹⁴. At the headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet, opinion on the matter was different and had serious reasons to be so.

At the start of the offensive, the headquarters of the Caucasus Army did not seek to coordinate their plans with the Fleet ahead of time. In February 1916 they informed the Navy of their plans in just a few days in advance, demanding naval support. It was not a big issue at a time when the necessary support could be provided by the ships of the small Batumi unit. However, when it became necessary to borrow from the main forces of the Fleet, the problem of early joint planning of operations became particularly serious. This was compounded by the fact that the Coastal Group operated quite independently, and its commander could make his own decisions about the scope and timing of individual operations. Liakhov often asked for help from the Fleet two to three days prior to an operation and although it was documented as a request, it contained specific orders on what to do.

From early on, admiral Eberhardt attempted to streamline the system of cooperation between the Army and Navy regarding the process of operation planning. He understood that establishing closer ties with the Army command would benefit everyone. Even during the initial period of the offensive of the Coastal Group at the end of February, he sent one of his closest advisors to the headquarters of the Caucasus Army: chief of the Department of Operations captain of the first rank Kazimir Ketlinskiy, to develop a mechanism for coordinating mission plans. Ketlinskiy was ready to defend the interests of the Fleet but considered the Army's requests seriously as well. He believed that with good cooperation “the Fleet could benefit the Army more than it apparently expects”¹⁵. A meeting with the Commander-in Chief of the Caucasus Army general Yudenich was held in recently captured Erzurum on February 21, 1916. Its participants reached an agreement on how the cooperation between the Navy and Army was to continue: during the planning period the Army headquarters should consult with the Fleet; if urgent assistance is needed from the Fleet — the Army command should communicate what exactly must be done and the Fleet will decide on ways in which to achieve the set goal; negotiations between the Army and the Navy should be conducted only through the headquarters of the Caucasus Army and the Black Sea Fleet, because all naval forces, including Batumi unit, take orders only from the headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet and cannot follow the instructions of land command¹⁶.

It would seem that the agreement satisfied both sides, but in the future, the Army often acted differently from what was the agreement dictated. The plan of the offensive of the Coastal Group on Trabzon that began shortly after the meeting in Erzurum was not coordinated with the headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet in advance. Once again, the Army decided on the worst option for the Fleet to progress along the coast instead of a fast amphibious operation directly into the Trabzon region. The mission plan was received at the headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet only on March 28 while the operation itself began on April 7¹⁷. The situation was further complicated for the Navy by Stavka's decision to finally allocate new land forces from the armies of the Russian Southwestern Front for the operation to capture Trabzon, which the navy had to carry and drop off in the region marked for the land offensive. Since this operation was deemed highly important by Stavka, the Black Sea Fleet was again forced to act according to plan developed by the Caucasus Army, without the ability to change it. Moreover, during the operation, in spite of the agreement, the Commander-in-Chief of the Fleet did not receive requests even from the staff of the Caucasus Army, but

¹³ Записка о действиях флота. Январь 1916. // Там же. Д. 884. Л. 1.

¹⁴ Бубнов А.Д. В царской Ставке. Нью-Йорк, 1955. С. 224.

¹⁵ Записка Кетлинского. Февраль 1916 г. // РГА ВМФ. Ф. 609. Оп. 1. Д. 884. Л. 74.

¹⁶ Соглашение в Эрзеруме от 8 февраля 1916 г. // Там же. Л. 99.

¹⁷ Приказ Эбергарда. 20 марта 1916 г. // Там же. Л. 269.

instead the commander of the Coastal Group general Liakhov. Liakhov not only set the target for the fleet, but also the number and class of the ships, often sending requests four to five days prior to their implementation date¹⁸.

It so happened that an effective system of cooperation of the Army and Navy was formed only by the commencement of the operation of the seizure of Trabzon. In April, Ketlinsky, was once again sent by Eberhardt for negotiations with the Army command. This time he went to the headquarters of the Coastal Group of Liakhov and the purpose of his visit was to determine the causes of the conflicts that arose between the Army and Navy. After returning Ketlinsky presented his assessment of the situation. From his point of view, the main problem was that, acting alone, Liakhov did not comply with the provisions of the agreement while the Navy did not require him to do so¹⁹. Another major problem was that the Army command was not aware of the conditions of naval operations and often required the Navy to do the impossible. As a matter of principle, it is possible to agree with this assessment. Liakhov was a Cossack officer, he perfectly knew the Caucasus where he spent his entire service. An excellent cavalry officer, he had no understanding of naval conditions during action at sea.

However, Ketlinsky also admitted the mistake of the Fleet, which was made by the Black Sea Fleet headquarters when assigning unsuitable officers for communication with the headquarters of the Coastal Group. Traditional mutual distrust between the naval and army officers manifested itself fully. Navy officers were united by their sense of belonging to a special caste and their common disdainful attitude towards their army colleagues. Ketlinsky himself witnessed how ostentatiously disrespectful the naval officers behaved in respect to Liakhov who was significantly higher than them in rank. A Soviet military historian and a naval officer himself, Nikolai Novikov, having analyzed the situation after World War I, also deemed the Army primarily responsible²⁰. The same time he did admit that army officers had reasons to disbelieve the ability of the fleet to conduct large amphibious operations because nothing of such nature had been done previously.

The cooperation procedures for the approval of mission plans established in Erzurum could hardly be adhered to at all times. Combat situations were changing rapidly, the Coastal Group operated quite independently, and in its actions contained a high degree of flexibility. In these circumstances it was natural for Liakhov to make decisions without lengthy preparation and to address his requests for support to the commander of the naval forces in the Black Sea or even directly to the commander of Batumi naval unit.

ARTILLERY SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THE FLEET

In January 1916 general Eberhardt, describing the role of the fleet in future operations, listed three types of action: artillery support and protection of supply routes, delivery of supplies, transport and landing of troops²¹. Artillery support was first on the list. Indeed, without it, the Coastal Group had little chance to be successful. The Coastal Group at various times had only 40–50 guns, but they were 76 mm (3 inch) field and mountain guns. Although the Russian 76 mm gun was quite effective against infantry, their effectiveness at shooting on fortified positions was not too high. By 1916, the Russian Army was still experiencing a shortage of artillery and ammunition, although it was not as severe as in 1915. In addition, the Caucasus front was occupied with many Cossack units less armed than the infantry. Typically, infantry and cavalry units had only their own divisional artillery at their disposal. In early 1916, Russian command had to assemble an artillery group in preparation for the assault of Erzurum. According to the recollections of colonel Evgeniy Maslovskiy, serving at the Caucasus Army headquarters, a significant portion of the Caucasus Army's field artillery: more than 160 guns and almost all of the heavy guns including the old fortress cannons, were allocated for that purpose²².

¹⁸ Ляхов — Эбергарду. 26 марта 1916 г. // Там же. Д. 937. Л. 203.

¹⁹ Отчет Кетлинского. 28 апреля 1916 г. // Там же. Д. 870. Л. 21.

²⁰ Новиков Н. В. Операции флота против берега на Черном море в 1914–1917 гг. М., 1937. С. 177.

²¹ Телеграмма Юденича. 22.01.1916 // РГВИА. Ф. 2100. Оп. 1. Д. 1049. Л. 4.

²² Масловский Е. В. Мировая война на Кавказском фронте, 1914–1917 гг. Париж, 1933. С. 266.

The Black Sea fleet was not the first to provide artillery support for ground forces. In September 1915, the Russian Baltic Sea fleet ships have already conducted such operations. As a result of a retreat of the Russian Army in 1915, the front line was pressed tightly against the coast of the Baltic Sea and the Russian ships were able to bombard German positions. Then it was clear that even old battleships, unfit for naval battles against enemy's modern ships, and smaller ships, such as destroyers carrying few guns can serve as excellent artillery support for the ground forces.

From the land army's standpoint, the warship was primarily seen as a combat platform with various guns, including long-range artillery and a large stock of ammunition. This platform could fire on several targets simultaneously, bombard the enemy's flank and rear, and quickly change location. All these advantages of naval artillery support became apparent at an early stage of the Coastal Group's offensive. On February 5–6 in 1916, the Batumi Naval unit comprising of the old battleship "Rostislav", two gunboats and four destroyers helped Russian troops brake through the Turkish positions that had previously been unsuccessfully attacked by the Russian infantry. Particularly successful were the next steps of the offensive on February 15–16. Liakhov sent the plan of operations and the necessary maps to the commander of the naval unit a few days in advance. The Navy was also better prepared for the fight, the primary care being the improvement of communications with the shore to receive information on targets and accuracy adjustments. At first, the messages were transmitted via signal flags with the help of a special team that was sent to the shore. In the second case, information transmission was carried out using a radio station, assembled specifically for this purpose by radio-operators of the "Rostislav" and placed on the shore²³. This arrangement played an important role in achieving success, since neither the Army nor the Navy had a way of mapping enemy positions previously and had to detect them during the battle.

Ships simultaneously fired on multiple targets: barbed wire fences, trenches, and artillery positions. They used mainly the 152 mm and 75 mm cannons, but when clearing Turkish fortified position took longer than was expected, the "Rostislav" used her main caliber 254 mm (10 inch) cannons. To destroy a fortified point using this method took only four shells²⁴. Attempts of the Turks to retreat to alternate positions and fortify there were not successful because the ships quickly pursued the enemy and opened fire on new targets. At one point in battle, ships came close enough to the shore to use their machine guns. Each time the ships managed to maintain the fire on the Turkish flank along the trenches, making it so more severe for the Turks. When the Turkish troops began to retreat, the destroyers came in from the back and transferred fire onto the fleeing infantry. Liakhov was very pleased with the Fleet's performance and in a telegram to Eberhardt, he expressed his appreciation saying that the fleet "brilliantly completed with the task"²⁵.

In preparation for the assault on Trabzon on March 9th, Liakhov submitted a plan of action for the artillery support ships directly to the headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet. It involved the participation of the main forces of the Batumi naval unit from the 12th to the 21st of April in bombardment of the Turkish front lines, fortifications of the Trabzon fortress and rear roads²⁶. Right before the mission, sea and land forces received substantial reinforcements. The Coastal Group was reinforced with two Cossack foot (plastun) brigades while the Batumi naval unit was strengthened by another battleship, the "Panteleimon" (former "Potemkin"). Until that moment, mostly medium caliber guns were used to support the ground troops, but now the land forces were to attack a fortress, and although it was not too strong, the additional heavy guns of the "Panteleimon" could prove to be very useful.

The operation to capture Trabzon was of great importance. Yudenich arrived in Batumi himself to control the situation. He did not however, interfere with the procedures of the operation. Interestingly, colonel Maslovskiy, a staff officer of the Caucasus Army located next to Yudenich, wrote after the war that he did not know how two battleships and escort ships appeared at the

²³ Римский-Корсаков – Эбергарду. 9 февраля 1916 г. // РГА ВМФ. Ф. 609. Оп. 1. Д. 890. Л. 31.

²⁴ Донесение командира «Ростислава». 7 февраля 1916 г. // Там же. Л. 29.

²⁵ Ляхов – Эбергарду. 6 февраля 1916 г. // Там же. Л. 23–25.

²⁶ Ляхов – Эбергарду. 26 марта 1916 г. // Там же. Д. 937. Л. 203.

Turkish positions as Caucasus Army headquarters did not send a request for their participation in the operation. He suggested that the Russian ships were sent by Eberhardt to intercept Turkish ships and the naval unit commander decided to help the army himself²⁷. Maslovskiy never found out that Liakhov had long preferred to contact Eberhardt and the commander of Batumi naval unit captain of the 1st rank Mikhail Rimsky-Korsakov directly. The operation was planned in advance and some army artillery officers who had the necessary maps were on board the ships. Moreover, Eberhardt already agreed on the necessity to pass operational control of the ships that supported the offensive of the ground forces to Liakhov. Commanders of ships were allowed to discontinue support of the ground units only in extreme cases imposed on them by conditions at sea²⁸. A fairly effective system of cooperation of marine and land forces was finally established. It differed from one provided for in the Erzurum agreement and was formed not as the result of new negotiations, but the recognition by main actors of the practicality of cooperative action.

Fleet ensured the success of the offensive and this time, on April 14, the bombardment of Turkish front lines significantly eased the assault. After breaking the initial defenses, ground troops began to prepare for the assault of the fortress and the ships went back to Batumi. Novikov, having served as a naval officer, found no other explanation as to why Liakhov sent ships to the port before the final assault, except general's desire to direct all glory in his own favor, by taking the city "in an impressive land assault"²⁹. The reality, however, was that Liakhov planned to give the troops a break and prepare an assault on April 19, hoping to enlist the help of the fleet once again. During this pause, there was no reason to keep the ships in the war zone. In his plan presented to Eberhardt, it was proposed that on April 19–21, both battleships and other ships will fire at Trabzon's artillery batteries and defenses while the destroyers will operate in the enemy rear³⁰. Apparently, it was the overall domination of Russian Black Sea Fleet that forced the Turks to abandon attempts to defend the fortifications of Trabzon. The assault was not required since the Turks voluntarily abandoned it on April 16.

LOGISTIC SUPPORT

Supplying the Coastal Group with necessary supplies, transportation of reinforcements and evacuation of injured soldiers became a recurring job of the Navy. While artillery support was required only during offensive operations, this work has become a persisting pattern. In February 1916, when the Coastal Group was still relatively close to Batumi, Liakhov had three transport ships at his disposal. For some time, these ships were able to handle their task, but as the front line moved away from their supply bases, the army units began to feel a lack of sufficient support. The land troops commander demanded more ships from the Fleet and eventually their number was increased to three times the original size, although the naval command believed that the problems arose due to the inability of Lyakhov and his staff to use the available means effectively³¹.

After the capture of the port Rize, the supply job was assigned to the Transport Flotilla of the Black Sea Fleet. This flotilla was established in March 1915 and consisted of former civilian ships requisitioned during the war to transport people and cargo³². The creation of such merger was intended to strengthen the Fleet's capabilities of a large-scale amphibious operation. Plans for the organization of large landing mission to capture Bosphorus were being developed in Russia since the end of the XIX century. On the eve of the outbreak of the war, the Russian command canceled the mission due to a lack of transport ships. When the British and French naval forces launched an operation against the Dardanelles, Russian Supreme Command once again considered the possibility of capturing the area, in case Allies succeeded in Dardanelles. In February 1915, the

²⁷ Масловский Е.В. Указ. соч. С. 327.

²⁸ Приказ Эбергерда. 14 апреля 1916 г. // РГА ВМФ. Ф. 609. Оп. 1. Д. 894. Л. 27.

²⁹ Новиков Н.В. Указ. соч. С. 210.

³⁰ Ляхов — Эбергарду. 26 марта 1916 г. // РГА ВМФ. Ф. 609. Оп. 1. Д. 937. Л. 203.

³¹ Эбергард — Русину. 12 апреля 1916 г. // Там же. Д. 893. Л. 11–25.

³² Айрапетов О.Р. На Восточном направлении. Судьба Босфорской экспедиции в правление императора Николая II // Последняя война императорской России. М., 2002. С. 212.

decision to resume the preparation for an expedition to Bosphorus was accepted and thus began the formation of the transport fleet for transportation of troops and supplies. In July 1915, it consisted of over 80 ships, separated into seven groups located in the ports of Sevastopol, Odessa, Nikolaev and Kherson. Having significant amounts of transport and cargo ships ready to for the pick-up and relocation of people and supplies became a great advantage when a need to substantially increase support for the offensive of the Coastal Group at Trabzon arose.

The successful capture of Rize, on the one hand eased the process of providing supplies, but on the other hand, the Fleet was now facing new challenges. It turned out that another group of the Caucasus Army under the command of general Mikhail Przhevalsky that was advancing parallel to Liakhov's group deep in Turkish territory, also needed supplies. All necessary supplies could be brought up to that group from Rize as well. The main advantage of controlling the port was the fact that it could be converted into a logistical supply base for Russian ground forces. If previously the Fleet had to constantly bring up all the necessary items, it was now possible to create stores in Rize and periodically replenish them. A good road ran along the coast from Rize to Trabzon, allowing Rize to supply the advancing troops. However, the port of Rize was not well-suited to receive such a large number of goods. There was also another problem – the port was not protected from possible attacks by Turkish and German naval forces. Meanwhile the cruiser “Breslau” continued her periodic raids on coasts occupied by Russian soldiers and bombarding the troops. Finding a solution to all these problems was also the responsibility of the Fleet, namely the Transport Flotilla of admiral Aleksandr Khomenko. Port of Trabzon was much better suited not only for the purpose of supplying the ground troops from the sea, but also as a small base for naval forces. Shortly after its capture, began the work meant to improve the port and ensure its defense against possible attacks from the sea; the responsibility for all these concerns were laid upon the Fleet. Fortified positions were being built for the batteries of 254 mm (10 inch) and 152 mm (6 inch) guns and nets were installed to protect the port from submarines. Until the equipment was operational, two gunboats and three destroyers were transferred to the fortress in Trabzon³³. It can be noted that overall, the navy accomplished its goal of supporting the ground troops well. The Coastal Group did not experience significant shortages of anything that was necessary.

THE FLEET'S TRANSPORTATION AND LANDING OF TROOPS

At the first stage of the offensive, the transport and landing of small contingent of ground forces were carried out by transport ships and warships of Batumi Naval unit. During the time when the fleet was supporting the Coastal Group, ships belonging to the Transport Flotilla had to carry and land ground troops regularly. The Black Sea Fleet did not have any experience with such transportations previously, so the Russian commanders carefully studied landing operations of the Allies. A special group of navy officers was sent in July 1915 to study this experience in Gallipoli. The product of their reports and education was a revised set of instructions. In November 1915, a new “Guide for amphibious operations in the Black Sea” was adopted and in January 1916, an order from The Chief of Staff of Russian Supreme Commander-in-Chief general Alekseev was issued concerning the cooperation of the Army and Navy during landing operations³⁴.

Under the new rules, the transport operations were to be led by the commander of the Transport Flotilla. His powers were extended for the duration of the operation: under his command were port commanders in locations where the troops were picked up and their points of landing. Alekseyev's order also introduced a new position within the Black Sea Fleet – Landing Commander, to which admiral Mitrofan Kaskov was the first to be appointed. Ranked under the Transport Flotilla Commander, the Landing Commander directly supervised each operation. Under his command were transport ships, escorts and support, and even the land troops until the completion of their transportation ashore. He was also tasked with development of a plan of operation and its coordination with the Army commanders.

³³ Каськов – Эбергарду. 22 мая 1916 г. // РГА ВМФ. Ф. 609. Оп. 1. Д. 894. Л. 77.

³⁴ Приказ Алексея. 16 января 1916 г. // Там же. Л. 20.

The first task assigned to admiral Kaskov in March 1916 was to develop a plan of landing ground troops in Trabzon. At that point the commander of the Black Sea Fleet still retained hope of receiving at least one division of land troops from the Army to be used in an assault on the Turkish port from the sea. The operation involved using the Transport Flotilla ships, three battleships, and all forces of Batumi Naval Unit including the battleship, destroyers, and other ships³⁵. It is interesting to note that the command of the Fleet planned to land troops on the enemy bank during battle, although the preparation for such operation in the Black Sea had never been carried out. This apparently explains the Fleet's readiness to allocate four battleships for the operation, since their artillery could clear the enemy from the bank and provide opportunity to land the ground forces without major losses.

The Fleet did have some experience of landing small units on an enemy shore; however, this was not done by the Transport Flotilla. In the first half of March 1916, supporting the offensive of the Coastal Group, ships of the Batumi Naval Unit landed troops three times at the rear positions of the Turks, carrying one infantry battalion in each case. All three operations were successful, but the Turks normally noticed Russian soldiers at a time when the majority had already gotten to the shore. Each time a successful landing became crucial to the success of the offensive. During this period, ships from Batumi also supplied reinforcements and even then, there were problems caused by the Army commanders demanding the Fleet to do what it could not. A typical situation was described in the report of the head of the Batumi Naval unit Rimsky-Korsakov. On March 21, 1916, the ships had to drop 24 officers, 900 soldiers and 95 horses with arms and supplies to strengthen the Coastal Group. Lyakhov insisted that troops landed as close to the front lines as possible despite the objections of naval officers. Sailors understood that the weather made landing on the unprepared shore dangerous but were forced to obey orders. As a result, the first landing boat capsized due to large waves. Fortunately, the 12 people who were on board were able to get ashore. Soon after, the ships headed for port Rize and landed the troops there without problems³⁶.

The transportation maneuvers involving relatively large contingents of troops had to be taken on by the ships of the Transport Flotilla. The first such operation was conducted on April 6–8 of 1916. Before commencing the offensive on Trabzon, Stavka decided to reinforce the Coastal Group with two Cossack foot brigades, which the Transport Flotilla had to deliver from Novorossiysk to the war zone. The primary contingents of both the Transport Flotilla and the Black Sea Fleet participated in the mission. Two modern dreadnoughts came out to sea with an escort to provide cover for the transport ships. On one of the two was Eberhardt himself. Overall, there were too many commanders present at the operation. The person in charge should have been Kaskov, but he had only recently begun his duties, so the commander of Transport Flotilla admiral Khomenko took over the leadership position. On one of the ships heading to port Rize, arrived general Yudenich. Under these conditions, disagreements could not be avoided. When the landing of troops in Rize was in full swing, Liakhov requested from the naval commanders that at least part of reinforcements was dropped off as close to the front as possible. The reason was that the Turks, knowing that Coastal Group should be receiving reinforcements, decided to attack before fresh Russian forces arrived at the front. The frontal Russian units had to repel furious attacks of the Turks and Liakhov, supported by Yudenich, decided to use ships to move his new fighting force into battle as quickly as possible. Admirals refused to change their plan of action, but soon found a compromise – the day after troops landed in Rize, they were again loaded onto ships rushed to the front. Just a few days, the Fleet transported 499 officers and 17 828 soldiers, 2913 horses, 462 cattle, 12 guns, 320 tons of cargo and even 5 camels without any losses³⁷.

After the capture of Trabzon, the fleet carried out an even more massive operation which transferred two infantry divisions to the coastal front. Strengthening the Russian troops in this area clearly demonstrated that the success of the Coastal Group did not go unnoticed in Stavka. The

³⁵ Приказ Эбергарда. 27 февраля 1916 г. // Там же. Д. 884. Л. 4.

³⁶ Рапорт Римского-Корсакова. 12 марта 1916 г. // Там же. Д. 937. Л. 68.

³⁷ Эбергард – Русину. 12 апреля 1916 г. // Там же. Д. 893. Л. 11–25.

Squad's advances and the capture of an important Turkish port was a major success for the Caucasus Army and gave hope for good strategic opportunities in the war against Turkey in the future. However, in 1916, the Caucasus campaign remained a secondary focus while the European theatre of operations was expected to require the most effort. Because of this belief, the primary goal for the Caucasus Army was to establish a foothold in the areas it had taken over which seemed to be far from easy – Russians were expecting arrival of Turkish reinforcements. The headcount of divisions ready to be transported to Trabzon was twice the number of two Cossack foot brigades that were delivered there earlier. The divisions also had more artillery, auxiliary units, and a larger volume of cargo. The port Mariupol in the Azov Sea was chosen as the loading point, making the trip noticeably longer. Granted, the Navy now had experience and organizing this operation proved less difficult. It was again necessary to use the primary naval forces, postponing all other missions at the time. Dreadnoughts, cruisers, and destroyers were out at sea providing cover for the ships of the Transport Flotilla³⁸. The transportation and landing went smoothly without any complications and the troops safely traveled to Trabzon. The last operation of this kind was conducted in June of 1916, using one dreadnought and several destroyers to transport a naval infantry battalion from Odessa to Trabzon.

DEFENDING AGAINST ATTACKS FROM THE SEA

An offensive along the coastal zone gave the Coastal Group a big advantage – the support of the Fleet. However, on the other hand, this situation became dangerous at those times when the Fleet could not protect the land forces from possible enemy attack from the sea. Although in 1916, the Russian Fleet mostly controlled the Black Sea, the actions of the Coastal Group forced the Germans and Turks use more actively naval forces capable to avoid the encounter with the main Russian force. Firstly, intensified was the use of the German submarines and the cruiser “Breslau”. Vulnerability to attacks from the sea troubled Liakhov and forced him to ask the Black Sea Fleet headquarters for help. In this regard, there were also disagreements between the Navy and Army. The Navy believed that the total dominance of Russian Fleet was sufficient protection for the advancing Russian troops and that constantly sending ships to protect the land troops was unnecessary. However, in particularly important moments the Fleet responded to the Army's requests. In early March 1916, the dreadnought “Imperatritsa Maria” and two destroyers were deployed for the protection of the land forces and their supporting ships. The main purpose of these forces was to protect the ships transporting troops and cargo, as well as the artillery support ships, from enemy submarine attacks. The Fleet did not consider the attacks of the “Breslau” a great danger and did not think it necessary to keep the ships at sea to protect from her attacks. According to Eberhardt, this German ship was only seen in action twice, the first time it mistakenly fired on Turkish positions and the second time the victims numbered 4 soldiers and approximately 20 wounded³⁹.

The primary naval forces always provided cover from the sea at times when the transport fleet was transporting troops. Eberhardt understood the severity of losing even one transport ship. Usually, the command deployed only the fastest ships – one or both dreadnoughts, cruisers, and destroyers. In June 1916, the dreadnought “Imperatitsa Ekaterina Velikaya” and three destroyers were sent to escort only two transport ships carrying a naval infantry battalion⁴⁰. These measures were very timely. German submarine activity in the first half of 1916 was steadily increasing, especially after a large German submarine U-33 arrived in Istanbul. German submarines managed to sink a number of small Russian cargo ships in different parts of the Black Sea, however, thanks to the precautions of the Black Sea fleet headquarters, the Russian fleet suffered no major losses.

CONCLUSION

Results of the joint operations of the Russian Black Sea Fleet and the Coastal Group of the Caucasus Army were very positive. At the beginning of the operations, commanders of the

³⁸ План действий флота. 28.04.1916 // Там же. Д. 870. Л. 5–7.

³⁹ Эбергард – Русину. 12 апреля 1916 г. // Там же. Д. 893. Л. 11–25.

⁴⁰ Приказ Эбергарда. 11 июня 1916 г. // Там же. Д. 894. Л. 108.

Caucasus Army presented the Coastal Group only with limited objectives, assuming that it will only be used to cover the flank of the main forces of the Army. The success of this group added to the importance of this region and Lyakhov received increasingly ambitious missions. The most important reason behind success was the close and effective interaction between the Navy and the Army, which allowed a relatively small land squad, detached from the supply lines, to attack successfully for nearly four months. Such interaction was possible primarily because the goals of Army and Navy generally coincided. The Caucasus Army was advancing, and the Coastal Group ensured the safety of its flank, while the capture of the Turkish ports Rize and Trabzon limited the opportunities of the Turks to bring in reinforcements and other necessary supplies. For the Black Sea Fleet, the main task of which was a blockade of the Turkish coast and the termination of all Turkish action at sea, capturing even a smaller Turkish ports was also important. The ability to define common goals, stems from the fact that the army and naval command were able to overcome the traditional distrust of each other and form a system of cooperation. Mutual dissatisfaction can be seen periodically in the remaining documents from the headquarters of the Black Sea fleet and the Caucasus Army, there were no situations in which this dissatisfaction would inhibit the progress of any missions. Often, the Fleet commanders made concessions and complied with the requests of the Army commanders despite their dissatisfaction with Army's plans and the way they were carried out. Even while disagreeing with the plans of the Caucasus Army, the headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet acted in accordance with them. This did not happen solely because the orders were given by Stavka, noting that requests for assistance often came directly from the commander of the Coastal Group general Liakhov. The Navy was fully aware of its responsibility and understood the importance of the support it provided for the Army and was ready to accept the fact that army commanders did not always follow the agreement on rules of cooperation put together by the two headquarters. At times when the situation and common sense truly demanded digressing from this agreement the Navy did not mind.

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