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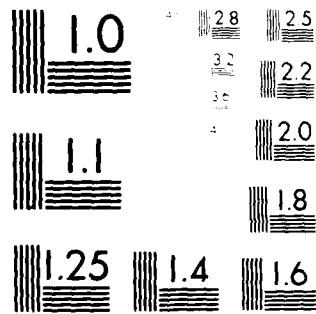
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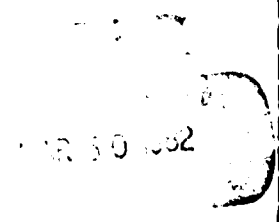
THE EVOLUTION OF THE SOVIET NAVY
(as seen by Admiral S.G. Gorshkov)
1981

LTC Henry J. St. Germain

GARMISCH, GERMANY

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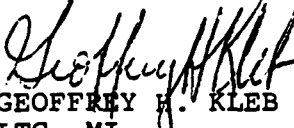
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GEOFFREY H. KLEB
LTC, MI
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Summary

In this paper the author presents a synopsis of Admiral Sergei G. Gorshkov's view of the evolution/development of the modern Soviet Navy in an effort to clarify the unique circumstances which produced this modern fleet. He concludes that Admiral Gorshkov has been less than candid and has deliberately propagandized his writings in order to further the goals of the Soviet Navy. Irrespective of this however, the author believes that Gorshkov has given the West the blueprint which he intends to follow in expanding the Navy's capability in the future.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
CIVIL WAR	2
REBUILDING PERIOD	4
WORLD WAR II	5
POSTWAR PERIOD	7
CONCLUSIONS	10

INTRODUCTION

Since the October Revolution in 1917, the Soviet Navy has developed into a force which makes its presence felt on a world-wide scale. It has become an important instrument of Soviet foreign policy. Its capability to conduct coordinated operations on all oceans of the world, simultaneously, was graphically demonstrated by the Soviet Navy in the largest peace-time naval exercises conducted since World War II -- OKEAN 70 and 71.

Given the world-wide presence and expanding capabilities of the Soviet Navy, Western maritime nations should be thoroughly familiar with the development of this force. A complete understanding of the evolution of the Soviet Navy and the challenge it now poses is necessary if the West is to maintain its ability to guarantee unhindered use of the seas.

There is no better way to understand an organization than to view it through the eyes of its creator.

Admiral Sergei G. Gorshkov: He was born on 26 February 1910 in the Ukraine, and entered the Navy at 17, serving in a variety of naval assignments. He was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Navy in 1956 -- the youngest man ever to hold that post. For almost twenty five years he has controlled the Navy and served two political leaders -- Khrushchev and Brezhnev. Under his tenure the Soviet Navy has been transformed from a coastal defense force to a modern, blue-water navy.

The following four sections represent Admiral Gorshkov's views of the development and role of the Soviet Navy while the final section is reserved for the author's critique of Adm. Gorshkov's analysis.

THE CIVIL WAR

The beginning of the modern Soviet Navy is marked by the October Revolution. During the conflict naval personnel played the role of one of the major forces of the Revolution.

Lenin personally directed detachments of sailors into the most important areas in the struggle for power...In a speech at the First all-Russian Naval Conference on 22 November (5 December) 1917, he stated: 'We see in the Navy a brilliant example of the creative capabilities of the working masses, and in this regard the Navy showed itself to be in the vanguard.'¹

In 1917 the Russian Navy had more than 1100 ships of various types and was 180,000 men strong. Lenin assigned it the mission of seizing key positions in conjunction with the Red Guard. The most important part of the action was to be performed by the Baltic Fleet. It was supposed to prevent the German Fleet from attacking the capital from the sea and also participate in the seizing of important government buildings and railway lines.

The AURORA entered the Neva River and positioned herself near the Winter Palace. On 7 November 1917 the historic signal was fired and the uprising began. The Winter Palace was seized on 8 November. The government had been overthrown and political power seized -- but many long battles lay ahead.

Threats to the new Communist government came from the "Old World". On 18 February, 1918, the Germans launched an offensive along the entire front. The Communist Party immediately replaced the Red Guard and other

partisan units with the Red Army and Red Navy of Workers and Peasants. In order to bolster these newly formed units, it was directed that each echelon of volunteers (1000 men) would include 40 sailors.

In the North, the naval situation was extremely poor. The Germans were preparing to seize the Baltic fleet because it was apparently trapped by ice and therefore couldn't depart from Helsingfors (Helsinki) and Revel as required by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. However, Lenin directed that the ships be moved to avoid capture. After completing a heroic "ice voyage" the entire fleet reached Kronstadt and Petrograd. During the remainder of the Civil War the Baltic Fleet served as a base for training and its sailors as the nuclei of many flotillas.

In the South, the Black Sea Fleet was forced to withdraw from Sevastopol and finally scuttled to avoid capture.

The interventionists landed in March 1918 at locations where the Soviet Navy could not oppose them -- Murmansk, Vladivostok and at Black Sea ports. They did not dare land in the Baltic area where a powerful Red Navy fleet was present.

At this time the Soviet Red Navy was much inferior, in weapons and ships, to the navies of the interventionists. Because of this the Red Army had to fight enemy forces after they had already established beachheads. The Navy was unable to exert any pressure on enemy sea lines of communication.

Throughout the Civil War, Soviet naval action was limited to joint actions with the ground forces. In fact, navy personnel performed heroically not only on board ship, but also on the ground (75,000 sailors fought with ground forces).

In that difficult struggle the Navy justified the faith shown in it by the Party, the government, and the people. The events of the Civil War once again confirmed the necessity of having within the makeup of our armed forces a powerful comprehensively developed navy.

THE REBUILDING PERIOD (1928-41)

Important in the history of the Soviet Navy was the development of a naval ship construction program in the First Five Year Plan. The decision basically called for a well-balanced force incorporating the appropriate amount of surface ships, submarines and aircraft.

Based on the developing international situation (a naval arms race), the Eighth Party Congress decided to build a strong, oceanic navy. It was necessary to build it in a short amount of time; and therefore the Second Five Year Plan called mainly for submarines to be constructed on a priority basis. (By 1 September 1939, the Soviet Navy had 165 submarines and, thus, it was the largest and most powerful submarine force in the world at the outbreak of World War II.)

Surface ships were initially limited to torpedo boats, escort ships and destroyers. The First and Second Five Year Plans produced 106 surface ships. Admiral Nikolai Kuznetsov notes, however, that in 1938:

It was decided to build battleships, heavy cruisers and other classes of surface warships; that is a big surface navy.

The shipbuilding program which was developed to fulfill this directive was heavily weighted with battleships and cruisers. The change of emphasis apparently occurred in an attempt to imitate the Western Powers which were rapidly building surface ships, considering them to be the foundation of their fleets. The Soviet Navy was in the process of constructing three battleships, two heavy cruisers, ten light cruisers and 45 destroyers when war broke out.

Naval aviation was also expanded. However, due to short operating range and weak armament, naval aircraft were never really effective in providing air support at sea. This deficiency hampered utilization of major surface forces in areas covered by enemy aircraft.

In the field of naval science in the 1930's, the Soviet Navy developed the first theory of amphibious landing operations and proved this theory in the course of training. The British, on the other hand, in an effort to justify the failure of the Dardenelles operation of 1915, convinced themselves and others of the impossibility of landing amphibious forces. The result was that, at the outbreak of the war, not one of the Western navies had developed a theory for amphibious operations and none had either specially constructed landing ships or troop units trained for these operations.

Unfortunately, the well-developed theory for conducting amphibious operations did not receive the needed emphasis (for mainly economic reasons); and when war broke out, none of the Soviet fleets had a single specially constructed landing ship.

This was not the only flaw in the pre-war Navy. Even with the large advances made in Soviet naval art, the predominant view was that the Navy was to be employed in only a defensive role. The capability for oceanic combat operations existed but was not utilized.

WORLD WAR II

On 22 June 1941, a savage struggle erupted between Germany and the Soviet Union. The Soviet fleets were not caught napping. Even though many naval bases were subjected to severe attacks by the German air force the Soviet Navy did not lose a single warship in the initial strikes.

The Navy had two missions: first, battle a strong enemy navy at sea and second, support the ground forces offensively and defensively. This was the correct employment because the Soviet Army had to shoulder the main load of the battle due to the particular features of the conflict. All branches of the Armed Forces had to support the ground forces.

The operations of our Navy against the enemy at sea constituted an important part of the war as a whole. However, the main effort of our Navy was directed towards the more important missions of aiding the ground forces which bore the brunt of the task of defending the nation against the enemy and, which, in the final analysis, determined the outcome of the war.⁴

Through active operations, the Soviet Navy provided assistance to the navies of the Western allies. The German Navy was forced to maintain large air and naval forces against Soviet naval forces. During the "Battle of the Atlantic", for example, twenty percent of all German submarines were kept in the Black, Baltic and Barents Seas. Therefore, the Soviet Navy made it possible for the United States and England, without interference from the enemy, to concentrate all their resources on building a huge transport fleet and on developing a tremendous anti-submarine force. Only because of the Soviet Armed Forces were the United States and England able to win the "Battle of the Atlantic".

The Soviet Navy's direct participation in the defense and liberation of coastal towns and the active participation of its personnel in ground battles were other important missions. Successful execution of this mission made a very large contribution to the defeat of the enemy. The Soviet Navy emerged from the war stronger, and more firmly determined to maintain superiority in all naval endeavors.

POSTWAR PERIOD

The postwar development of the Soviet Navy can be divided into two stages. The first stage covered the first 10 years after the war. During this period conventional-type ships were built and armed with conventional weapons. The goal of the Navy was to construct squadrons of surface ships. Doctrine dictated that the Navy be primarily concerned with coastal operations. This doctrine was the result of the experience of World War II. Additionally, at that time there were no new technological developments in weapon systems. The Soviet Union did not possess nuclear weapons and missiles were still on the drawing boards.

The second stage of development began in the mid 1950's. Based on technological progress in the nuclear weapon and missile fields, a decision was made to make a major effort to build a nuclear-missile Navy. Since that time the Soviet Navy has become a force capable of accomplishing major operational and strategic missions on the oceans of the world.

Major changes have occurred in all aspects of the Soviet Naval Forces and their equipment. The Soviet Navy has developed along original lines which are manifested in the design features of ships, aircraft and weapons.

Submarines: In developing the Soviet Navy, the fact that Western countries had large surface fleets and large shipbuilding industries had to be taken into account. In order to obtain parity with these navies, the Soviet Union would have had to concentrate all her economic potential on a single service -- the Navy. This was not possible.

In order to increase the maritime strength of the Soviet Navy, priority was given to the development of submarines. This made it possible, in a short amount of time, to rapidly increase the Navy's attack capabilities at an acceptable cost.

There are two stages in the development of Soviet submarine forces: The first stage was primarily diesel and the second was nuclear.

In the first stage, attention was directed at improving speed, range and navigation. Later in the late 1950's, several diesel submarines received cruise and ballistic missiles. These weapon systems, along with significant improvements in submergence depth due to new hull design, made these diesel submarines powerful and effective warships.

The second stage began with the construction of nuclear powered submarines. The prolonged at-sea-time, high speed, and great operating depth capabilities of these submarines make them true underwater combatants. The powerful characteristics of the Soviet Navy are displayed by nuclear submarines: great striking power, high mobility and a global mission. Nuclear submarines are the strategic resource of the Soviet armed forces.

Surface Ships: While the Soviet Navy was stressing the construction of submarines, surface ships lost their place of importance in the fleets. There was also some reluctance to build a large number of surface ships due to their vulnerability to enemy air power. As soon as these surface ships left the protective umbrella of the continental air defense system, they fell prey to enemy aircraft.

However, in spite of this major weakness in their defensive armor, surface ships were and still are extremely important. They have the ability to maintain constant communications with shore command posts,

are the foundation of landing forces, and can perform a broad range of missions in local wars.

The perfection and installation of powerful antiaircraft missiles and their acquisition radars aboard surface ships made possible the guided-missile type surface vessel. The development of these ships began with a single launcher for a cruise missile and evolved into today's heavily armed guided-missile cruisers and patrol boats.

A word should be said about the blending of aircraft and surface ships -- the aircraft carrier. Its development continues even today. However, even greater attention is being given to helicopter-carrying ships. This gives these ships entirely new combat capabilities. Helicopters extend the capabilities of the mother ship and provide her with the ability to conduct prolonged tracking of enemy submarines. Additionally, ship-based helicopters can perform a wide variety of other missions.

Naval Aviation: Before the advent of missiles, aircraft were assigned the mission of destroying or neutralizing attack groups of naval forces. However, with the development of land and sea-based missiles and an ever-increasing number of nuclear-powered submarines, the main mission of naval aviation became anti-submarine in nature. Therefore, there is a sharp increase in the importance of antisubmarine aircraft capable of effectively searching for and destroying submarines in ocean theaters.

The increasing capabilities of naval aviation, its missiles and their ability to overwhelm a ship's air defense system have made air nuclear-missile attacks against sea targets practically unstoppable.

The huge effort to build and develop an oceangoing Navy after World War II has resulted in major changes in the alignment of naval forces in

the world and in the forces and equipment themselves. The Soviet Navy will continue to develop even further and in a very intensive manner. A combatant should always possess the latest achievements in technical progress and therefore the Soviet warships of the future will also reflect the level of development of science and industry in the Soviet Union.

No one can say what will occur in the next 20 to 25 years, but major changes in tactics and weapons will most likely take place. Laser technology could lead to the development of entirely new military weapons and consequently to the appearance of new tactics. A growing amount of diverse electronic equipment for control, communications and detection will be required. To an ever increasing degree, combat operations will move into the sub-surface and air environments.

Today the Soviet Navy is a fully modern ocean-going navy fully equipped to carry out its mission anywhere in the world.

It is essential to stress once more the fundamental difference in goals for which the navies of the imperialist states on one hand, and the Navy of the Soviet Union on the other hand have been established and exist. Whereas the naval forces of the imperialist states are an instrument of aggression and neocolonialism; the Soviet Navy is a powerful factor creating favorable conditions for the building of Socialism and Communism, a factor for the active protection of peace and for the strengthening of international security.

CONCLUSION

Admiral Gorshkov is obviously writing for publication and on numerous occasions throughout his writings, he propagandizes facts and situations. A closer look must be taken of the various periods in Soviet naval development.

Civil War: Concerning this period Admiral Gorshkov attempts to root the traditions of the Soviet Navy in the Revolution and extols the leading role played by it. His basic problem is that the Navy was "born"

through a mass mutiny. He attempts to tie the Soviet Navy's loyalty directly to the Communist Party and thus makes a normally abominable act a virtue.

Of more importance however is Gorshkov's description of how the navy was utilized during this period. Its experience was one of service ashore fighting with ground troops, scuttling of ships and heavy emphasis on riverine operations. This role was to continue for three decades.

The experience of the Civil War and the backward state of Soviet industry severely limited the type of Navy the Soviet Union built. The resources that could be spared were used to construct a fleet that fitted the Bolshevik's perception: the Navy must protect the seaward flanks of the Red Army.

The Rebuilding Period (1928-41): The plan for naval development which was incorporated into the First Five Year Plan was in reality a modest one. Stalin viewed the Navy (initially) as a coastal defense organization whose mission it was to support the ground forces. Two important characteristics of today's Soviet Navy began at that time: heavy emphasis on submarines and use of land-based rather than sea-based air.

Gorshkov glowingly describes the development of the first theory of amphibious landing operations as proof of the Soviet Navy's lead in the field of naval doctrine. However, he does not recognize or address the fact that the Soviet Navy failed to develop three fundamental needs: an anti-submarine capability, means of supplying logistical support at sea, and the means to project naval airpower at sea.

In fairness, the Soviet Navy was operating under a severe handicap. It was controlled by a dictator who saw little, initially, in seapower.

Stalin, viewing the rapid shipbuilding programs of the West with suspicion, did eventually make plans in the late 1930's to build a large surface navy. He undermined this plan, and the already existing Navy by decimating its leadership through purges. (Gorshkov interestingly, never makes mention of Stalin or his purges.)

The fact that naval leadership was lacking in World War II is evidenced by the performance of the Soviet Union's submarine fleet during the war. The Soviet Navy had the largest submarine force in the history of the world and yet it seldom left its coastal waters.

World War II: When discussing the role of the Navy during World War II, Gorshkov indirectly acknowledges that the Soviet Navy was primarily a coastal defense force. He praises the support the Soviet Navy provided the allied navies by remaining deployed around home waters and lands in order to facilitate the employment of Naval Forces in support of ground troops.

Nowhere does Gorshkov criticize the manner in which the Navy was utilized during the war. He never infers that the Navy could have operated more offensively on the high seas and thus might have contributed much more to the defeat of the Axis forces.

Admiral Gorshkov merely mentions the American and British navies and the "Battle of the Atlantic". He erroneously contributes their victory to the Soviet Navy. Germany kept twenty percent of her submarines in or near Soviet waters not to battle the Soviet Navy but to destroy large convoys bringing much-needed supplies to the Soviet Union.

This type of propaganda is significant in so far as it highlights the possibility that Gorshkov is having difficulty in gaining support for his naval programs. By writing in such a manner he avoids antagonizing

the hierarchy and at the same time recounts the "excellent" performance of the Navy on every occasion.

Postwar Period: The theme of this portion of Gorshkov's writing is a description of the type of naval forces he believes are appropriate to the Soviet Union. He points out that imitating other navies is not the proper course. The Soviet Navy, he explains has developed in an original manner.

Gorshkov is vague, in some respect, in his explanation of the role of naval aviation: is it for projection of power ashore or for sea control? He also avoids explaining the role of his submarines. The strategic role is obvious, but he does not discuss their role in anti-submarine or anti-shipping operations. In spite of this, it is clear that both submarines and aviation are viewed by Gorshkov as the backbone of the Soviet Navy.

Finally, he strongly emphasizes the need for ship-borne aviation. His citing of the U.S.'s utilization of helicopters to carry out vertical envelopments is an indication of the Soviet Navy's drive to obtain the capability to project power ashore in a global context.

His assertion that any weapons system can be defeated by a concentration of effort (i.e. helicopters in an antisubmarine role and aviation's nuclear-missile attack capability against sea targets) infers that the Soviet Navy is working towards neutralizing the U.S.'s nuclear-missile submarines and aircraft carriers before they can come within striking distance of Soviet land or sea targets.

Gorshkov subscribes to the strategy of meeting your enemy while he is still far from your shores. His writings explain the need for a large balanced Soviet Navy consisting of subsurface, surface and air

forces, capable of controlling the seas against the strongest naval powers, either individually or in combinations. There is no doubt that Admiral Gorshkov will attempt to expand all elements of Soviet naval power. He makes clear that the Soviet's ultimate goal is the ability to win control of the seas.

... The Soviet Navy is moving from its traditionally defensive posture to the capability to project power beyond the shadows of the homeland. While in Soviet parlance, the primary mission of the Soviet Navy will undoubtedly remain the defense of "Mother Russia" the distinction is largely academic when the other guy is defending his mother in your backyard.⁶

Footnotes

¹S.G. Gorshkov, Morskaya Moshch Gosudarstva, (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1979), p. 182.

²Ibid., p. 188.

³N. Polmar, Soviet Naval Development (Annapolis: The Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1979), p. 35.

⁴Gorshkov, p. 208.

⁵Ibid., p. 307.

⁶T.A. Brooks, "Whither the Soviet Navy?" Proceedings, February, 1980, p. 104.

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