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The development of navy skill in the Russian-Japanese War of 1904–1905: concise description

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Abstract: This research is devoted to elucidate the development of navy skill during to the Russian-Japanese War of 1904–1905. This war caused by the struggle for hegemony in the Eastern Asia between two countries takes a special place in the history. This war was the largest among the first wars of steam fleet epoch. All sorts of navy arms were widely used during this war. The Russian and Japanese plans of sea war were based on the theory of “Mahen-Colomb”. Germany and Austria-Hungary saw in the events in Manchuria an evidence of the military weakness of Russia, which became the basis for their unjustified self-confidence in the 1914. Modern researches are based on well-known facts, they involve new sources into circulation, and overcome the predetermined ideological interpretations. The previous theoretical and methodological approaches are being revised. In historiography, especially in Russia, a spectrum of interpretations of an exceptional diversity is preserved. There is a persistent desire, if necessary, to expand. The newest theoretical and technical elaborations were tasted in this war. This war was the starting point and the powerful impulse for a future rapid development of all navy skill branches of leading world-powers. The fighting sides were developing all navy skill branches already during this war. There are highlighted the development of the tactics of light forces of fleet as well as the using of the mine-torpedo weapon and coordination fleet and ground forces.

Keywords: artillery, armor-plated ship, art, cruiser, manoeuvre, mine, torpedo boat, scouting, tactics, torpedo, fleet, squadron

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Развитие военно-морского искусства в Русско-японской войне 1904–1905 гг.: краткое описание

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Аннотация: Данное исследование посвящено выяснению развития военно-морского мастерства в период Русско-японской войны. Русско-японская война 1904–1905 гг., вызванная борьбой за гегемонию в Восточной Азии между двумя странами, занимает особое место в истории. Эта война была самой крупной среди первых войн эпохи парового броненосного флота. Различные виды морского вооружения широко использовались в ходе этой войны. Русский и японский планы морской войны основывались на известной теории «Махен-Коломба». Одним из последствий Русско-японской войны стало то, что Германия и Австро-Венгрия сочли боевые действия в Маньчжурии и на Тихом океане свидетельством военной слабости России. Это в свою очередь породило необоснованную самоуверенность центральных держав в 1914 г., перед самым началом Первой мировой войны. Современные исследования опираются и на общеизвестные факты, и вовлекают в оборот новые источники, и преодолевают предрешенность идеологических трактовок. Пересматриваются прежние теоретико-методологические подходы. В историографии, особенно российской, сохраняется исключительный по разнообразию спектр трактовок. Налицо настойчивое стремление при необходимости расширить контекст рассмотрения и избежать упрощенный подход к проблемам. В Русско-японской войне были опробованы новейшие теоретические и технические разработки. Эта война явилась отправной точкой и мощным импульсом для даль-

нейшего стремительного развития всех отраслей военно-морского мастерства ведущих мировых держав. Воюющие стороны развивали все отрасли военно-морского мастерства уже во время этой войны. В ней освещены: развитие тактики морского боя, совершенствование действий легких сил флота и использование минно-торпедного оружия, а также организация взаимодействия флота и сухопутной армии.

Ключевые слова: артиллерия, броненосец, искусство, крейсер, маневр, мина, миноносец, разведка, тактика, торпеда, флот, эскадра

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The outcome of the Russian-Japanese War of 1904–1905 had a decisive influence on international relations such as on Russia's influence in the world, and the authority of the Russian monarchy within the country and in the world. For example, there is very widespread thesis that during the existence (from the beginning of the 18th century) of the Russian Navy, it participated in 24 major battles, of which it won 23 and lost in one – Tsushima. Germany and Austria-Hungary saw in the events in Manchuria evidence of the military weakness of their eastern neighbor, which became the basis for their unjustified self-confidence in the summer and autumn of 1914.

Russia's deliberate non-intervention in the Bosnian crisis of 1908–1909 allowed Austria-Hungary in 1914 to believe that Russia would retreat at the last minute and would not help Serbia. The disappearance of the factor of earlier (before 1905) powerful Russian Baltic Fleet became an additional basis for Germany's offensive rather than defensive behavior. Military actions were reported in the press of the largest naval powers, ec. in Germany. "Taschenbuch der Kriegsflotten" 1904, 1905, 1906 (Der japanisch-russische Seekrieg, 1911).

However, the low assessment of the military power of the Russian Empire turned out to be deeply mistaken. The Russo-Japanese War became a timely combat exam, following which a comprehensive "correction of mistakes" was carried out. The military industry of Russia, especially the shipbuilding industry, had received serious development. Both land and sea combat experience had been systematically and comprehensively analyzed. Great successes had been achieved in military theory, as well as in mobilization

practice and the general development of the national economy.

Modern researches are based on well-known facts, they involve new sources into circulation, and overcome the predetermined ideological interpretations (Chistyakov, 1988; Mel'nikov, 1989; Chistyakov, 2008; Likharev, 2009). The previous theoretical and methodological approaches are being revised (Fedorov, 2005¹; Antipin, 2013²; Frolov, 2018³). In historiography (Zolotarev, Kozlov, 1990; Diskant, 2003), especially in Russia, a spectrum of interpretations of an exceptional diversity is preserved (Galenin, 2009; Bol'nykh, 2010; Gribovskii, 2012; Airapetov, 2014; Balakin, 2017; Lisitsyn, 2020, P. 220–232, 384–413). There is a persistent desire, if necessary, to expand

¹ Fedorov N.V. (2005) The theory of "sea power" of Admiral A.T. Mahan and its influence on the naval policy of the Great Powers: 1890–1914: dissertation ... Candidate of Historical Sciences. St. Petersburg. 211 p. (In Russ.)

Федоров Н.В. Теория «морской силы» адмирала А.Т. Мэхэна и ее влияние на военно-морскую политику великих держав: 1890–1914 гг. : дис. ... канд. ист. наук. Санкт-Петербург, 2005. 211 с.

² Antipin N.A. (2013) Russo-Japanese War in the cultural memory of the Russian society: 1904–2000s: Dissertation ... candidate of Historical Sciences. Chelyabinsk. 248 p. (In Russ.)

Антипин Н.А. Русско-японская война в культурной памяти российского общества: 1904–2000-е гг. : дис. ... канд. ист. наук. Челябинск, 2013. 248 с.

³ Frolov I.A. (2018) Russo-Japanese war of 1904–1905 in the Russian historiography of 1904–1917: abstract of the dissertation of the Candidate of Historical Sciences. Moscow. 38 p. (In Russ.)

Фролов И.А. Русско-японская война 1904–1905 гг. в отечественной историографии 1904–1917 гг. : автореф. дис. ... канд. ист. наук. Москва, 2018. 38 с.

the context of consideration and to avoid a simplified approach to problems.

The race of the leading world-powers for navy armaments and connected with it the rapid progress of military technique in the last decades of the XIX century set the problem of the most effective use of new navy forces. Many theories devoted to solving the task appeared at that time. Two of them got most widely spread among military sailors of the world.

One of them is the theory of “Mahen-Colomb” whose authors were an American A. Mahen and an Englishman F. Colomb. And the other is the theory of “Young school” created in France. A sharp rival began among the supporters of those two theories at the end of XIX century and at the beginning of the XX century.

By the theory of “M.-C.” the sea war is an independent war of fleets. The main idea of this theory is to get a domination on the sea by a decisive and general battle of ironclad forces. According to the theory this battle should be an artillerist duel of ironclads in which the strongest would win. They offered to increase the class of ironclads and to perfect artillerist arming. And all other navy forces should just be an appendage to the ironclad forces. The authors forgot about interaction of navy and land forces. The “Young school” theory denies the decisive importance of the general battle of ironclad forces in a sea war. The authors thought that light ships and strong explosives would play the main role in the sea war. The greatest importance was given to the active operations of cruisers.

“The Japanese plan of sea war was based on the theory of «Mahen-Colomb». The idea of a smashing, rapid, sudden blow to the chief Russians forces in the Port-Arthur for getting a domination on the sea was the main idea” (Naumov, 2015. P. 62).

In Russia the preparation of navy to the war and the development of navy skills had more problems. There was no unity of points of view on navy skills on the eve of the war. There was a stubborn straggle between the supporters of the “M.-C.” on one side and the supporters of the “Y.s.” theory on the other side. The government could not decide what navy fleet Russia needed. “The government could not choose

whether it should have been the ocean cruiser fleet with considerable independence of actions on the enemy communications or the ironclads fleet for actions near the coasts. As the result the ships of all types were being built, but not systematically. It was decided that Japan would probably be the opponent in the future war because of the deterioration of Russian-Japanese relations. It was decided only in 1897. The waters of the Far East were decided to be the war theater at the sea. Accordingly the government elaborated the program of building a large amount of ironclads and cruisers with powerful arms and strong armor, but with small radius of operating” (Naumov, 2015. P. 64).

The absence of the unity in questions of tactics had an influence on the readiness of the navy commanders. The level of the fighting knowledge of the navy personnel was high, but the tactics skills of the commanders of ships, detachments, squadrons were low. The role of tactical investigation and the importance of the organization of the navy bases guard against the attacks from the sea was underestimated by Russian navy commanders. So the Russian fleet did not make any intelligence near the Port-Arthur before the war. Only 2 torpedo boats were singled out to guard the outer roadstead where the squadron was located and 2 ships with searchlights periodically lighted the roadstead. The interaction with the coast artillery was not organized. The beginning of the war showed that all these measures were insufficient. The Japanese made a sudden torpedo boat impact to Russian ships and damage 3 of them.

As the result Russian navy did not have any common conception of the war with Japan and consequently it was not well prepared for the fighting.

The tactic preparation of the Russian navy had been carried out till the death of the vice-admiral S.O. Makarov on the “Petropavlovsk” ironclad on the 13th of April, 1904. Then the tactic preparation was stopped because of the weakening of navy ironclad forces (out of 7 ironclads – 1 was sank, 3 were destroyed and were being repaired).

The second big sea fight among Russian and Japanese fleets was the fight on the 10th of August, 1904 in the Yellow sea. It happened when Russian

squadron tried to brake through to Vladivostok from besieged by the Japanese Port-Arthur (where the ships were under artillery bombardment).

The order of the commander-in-chief of the army in the Far East, admiral E.I. Alekseev, to break through to the Vladivostok no matter how made the main influence on the tactic of the Russian fleet in that fight. That is why the Russian fleet did not try to fight with the enemy and put to it the maximal losses but on the contrary avoided the fight and went to Vladivostok. Those considerations caused the passive character of the fight. But the commander of the Russian squadron, contr-admiral V.K. Vitgeft used mistakes of the Japanese in their maneuvering in the first phase of the fight, and the Russian fleet almost broke through Japanese fleet. But the advantage of Japanese ships in speed (18 knots vs. 14.5 knots) helped the Japanese fleet to reach the Russian fleet and to renew the fight with Russians. But because of the chosen passive tactics and the lack of practice in transmitting the commander power the Russian squadron broke up after the perish of V.K. Vitgeft (one part of the ships went to neutral ports following the orders were it was interned – 1 ironclad, 2 cruisers, 4 torpedo-boats, and the most part of the ships – 5 ironclads, 1 cruiser, 3 torpedo boats – returned to Port-Arthur).

The advantage of the Japanese was in the light forces which were not used. The sight-adjustment and firing were difficult because of the artillery fire decentralization. At last, the fight was held without determination because the maneuver of the enveloping and destroying the leaderships was not completed.

The fight in the Yellow sea on the 10th of August, 1904 made a powerful influence on the future development of the tactics. The fight showed the importance of the maneuvering in detachments, the importance of the advantage in speed (only that advantage helped the Japanese to reach the Russians). The revealed increase of big caliber artillery's role was connected with bigger distance of the fight (it was held on a distance of 4,5–2 sea miles, 45–20 cables), the fight also showed the importance of the leading of the fleet and the necessity in reliable signal system, the fight showed the necessity of the central organization of the firing, and, at last, the fight showed that there

should have been an interaction of all forces and all means of the navy besides just artillery fire for getting a success on the condition of the active maneuvering.

But only Japanese seamen took a lesson from the fight on the 10th of August. Russians did not use the lesson because the Russian squadron in Port-Arthur was not active after that fight. The 2nd Russian Pacific squadron began its famous campaign to the Far East in October, 1904. They did not use the lesson either (on the reasons described below).

There was no any Russian base on their way of the 2nd Pacific squadron. It was the most important thing to provide the squadron well enough. That complicated task was solved in the following way: the route of the squadron was a secret for safety, an interrupted supply of coal and food was organized, a self moving repairing base was made from specially equipped steamers. Good security was organized on the anchorites because of the experience of Port-Arthur. The detachment of old ships of contr-admiral N.N. Nebogatov (1 ironclad, 3 coast guard ironclads, 1 cruiser) joined to the squadron for strengthening it after the wreck of Port-Arthur squadron ships.

The 2nd Pacific squadron came to the war region in May, 1905. This campaign affected the navy skill development.

The Tsushima fight, the last big fight of the Russian-Japanese war happened on the 27th of May, 1905.

The tactics chosen by Z.P. Rozhdestvensky did not use the experience of that war and in the whole was the reason of the Russian squadron defeat. The plan of the fight was not worked out. There was no conference of the flag-officers and the commanders about the future fight. The questions of transmitting the leadership in the fight were not decided and discussed. The squadron fought in a column consisting of new fast moving and old ships, on the speed of 9 knots.

The skillful tactic actions of the detachment commanders and the new methods of the artillery firing by the squadron volley gave the victory to the Japanese in the Tsushima. The Japanese maneuvered on the high speed of 16 knots.

The Tsushima fight on the 27th of May, 1905 summed up the sea fight tactic development in the Russian-Japanese war. The fight showed the preference of the tactic of enveloping maneuvers to the tactic of fight on parallel courses. The importance of high speed war was showed in this fight. It was the speed of the ships that gave possibility of making systematically the maneuver of the enveloping to the Japanese. The new method of firing organization made a good job during the fight. The middle caliber gun role decreased because the fire distance became more extended.

The Tsushima fight also showed the necessity of organization of the continuous tactic intelligence. Thus the tactic intelligence became the most important part of the sea fight tactic and the most important part of the success in it.

The Russian Pacific fleet was doing a little, episodic inquiring in the first month of the war. The detachments of torpedo-boats were looking around the coast bays periodically and sometimes were on duty in them at night. There was no search of the enemy. The tactic intelligence expanded after S.O. Makarov's coming to Port-Arthur. The instruction demanded to find the enemy, to define his forces and intentions, to fight him if possible (The Russian-Japanese war..., 1910a. P. 485). The torpedo boat detachments were inquiring day and night in March-April, 1904. Those forces constantly increased. For the first time there were 1–2 (later 9–16) torpedo boats for inquiring (The Russian-Japanese war..., 1910a. P. 486). But the activity of Russian intelligence became lower and ceased after the perish of Makarov. The 2nd Pacific squadron inquiring was done on the four approaches to the future anchorage by the cruisers and the torpedo boats. But there was no inquiring during the campaign. That is why the Russians knew nothing about the position of the Japanese before the Tsushima fight.

Japanese fleet-blockaded Port-Arthur before the descent operation of Japanese forces. The blockade began on the 28th of April, 1904. Investigation was carried out by the blockading ships and went on till the end of the blockade. The radio communication was used during the reconnoitring.

The patrol service-was strengthened in the Korea strait at the end of April. The patrol ships were lined in 2 parlor skirmish chains. There were 12 auxiliary cruisers in the south of the strait and 8 light cruisers in the very strait (The navy actions..., 1910. P. 37).

The sea fight tactic skill got the greatest development during the Russian-Japanese war. The light forces were on the auxiliary role before. The Russian-Japanese war demonstrated the expansion of the sphere of action of the navy forces. During the war the light forces tactic got a big development, and completely new, unsuspected before new forms and methods of the light forces navy fight appeared.

Before the Russian-Japanese war the most important light forces' tasks besides the reconnaissance were torpedo blows and carrying out the cruisers operations on the communications of the enemy. But for some reasons those trends of light forces activity got the least development during the war.

The first torpedo blow fight showed the little radius of torpedo actions and impossibility for torpedo boat (a rather big ship) to come close enough to the enemy to attack it at the day time because of the active counteraction of the last. That is why the torpedo boats were acting basically at night during the war. Besides, the Russian seamen activity was not good enough because the lack of torpedo boats (there were 25 torpedo boats in Port-Arthur) and, especially, of torpedoes.

The cruiser operations were rare. The Japanese navy did not plan and did not carry out those operations at all. The main cause was that Russia did not have large sea communication in the Far East. And on the contrary the island situation of Japan and sea transport gave large opportunities for cruising on its communications and influence upon the war. But the Russian navy did not have enough cruisers for such operation (Klado, 1905. P. 302).

For increasing the cruiser war Russians tried to use the auxiliary cruisers, which were reconstructed from fast commercial steamers. Two of them began to operate in the Red sea and 4 of them near the Hybroltar strait in summer, 1904. But their cruising was not effective and was stopped because they were far away from the place of war actions, because of the

impossibility to determine the military contraband and because of the diplomatic complications. Another try was in May, 1905, when 4 auxiliary cruisers began operations on the Japanese communications in the Pacific Ocean.

Nevertheless the experience was carefully studied and it was used by Germany during the I World War in spite of limitation of the cruiser's operations and their low efficiency.

The mine defense was very important for Russian commanders because of Japanese navy majority. The mine defense plan provided protection of many bays of the Kvantunsky peninsula, the outer road of Port-Arthur, and also protection of Amursky and Ussuryisky bays. In the whole Russians put 1630 mines in obstacle at the beginning of the war (The Russian-Japanese war..., 1910a. P. 91, 355).

But the both sides began to use mines in the attack soon after the war beginning. The mine skill tactic was perfected because of this. The minefields were used as one of such actions. And several steamers were reconstructed into the mine boats by the Japanese. The minefielding began in April, 1904. First the mines were laid in 10 miles distance from Port-Arthur, and the Japanese hoped that the night tide would carry mines to the Russian base. The Japanese changed their tactics because that method was not effective. It was decided to put mines on the outer Port-Arthur roadstead.

The Japanese repeated the method near Vladivostok, where they laid 715 mines (The navy actions..., 1910. P. 13). The "Gromoboy" ironclad cruiser was heavy damaged on the eve of the Tsushima fight and as a result Vladivostok cruiser detachment could not help the 2nd Pacific squadron.

The minelayer "Amur" laid 50 mines in 11 miles from the port on the 14th of May, 1904. Two Japanese ironclads wrecked on this mines on the next day.

They put contrivances on the 2 torpedo boats for taking 2 mines on each at the beginning of July, 1904. But their low efficiency forced them to search new ideas. Soon they found the decision. Railroad rails for 12 mines were placed on the "Reshitelny" torpedo boat. Its first mining was in 11 miles from Port-Arthur on the 4th of August (The Russian-Japanese war...,

1910b. P. 304). The range of usage of torpedo boats became wider. They were used both for torpedo attacks and for mining.

The rails were placed on the other 3 torpedo boats after the sea firing in the Yellow sea on the 10th of August, 1904. They made 7 campaigns and laid 112 mines (Bykov, 1942. P. 62). The quantity of mining could have been bigger, but the mine reserve was exhausted in Port-Arthur, so they used trawled Japanese mines. 1077 mines were mined near Port-Arthur by Russians and 12 Japanese ships were wrecked (Sorokin, 1952. P. 263), several were damaged by this mines.

In the whole the mine using tactics well developed during the Russian-Japanese war. It happened because of fight conditions (the coast zone), the cheapness and the mine making simplicity, and the night efficiency of that weapon. The principle methods and ways of mine war appeared during the Russian-Japanese war. This sphere of the navy skill was developed very rapidly.

The necessity of fighting against mines appeared because of its total usage. The organization of mine trawling was planned by both sides before the war. They thought the trawling was a job for cutters and launches. The metal hawser was used for trawling by placing it between two ships. That very type of trawling was used by Russian navy for trawling Port-Arthur's roadstead. Thus a new constant navy detachment, the trawl caravan, appeared and increased constantly afterwards.

Then there was a new permanent detachment of the fleet-the trawl caravan, which subsequently constantly increased.

In summer, 1904 it consisted of 7 steam chandlers, 6 cutters, 2 light steamers and 4 mine layers (The Russian-Japanese war..., 1910b. P. 91, 223). The gun boats and mine layers were used to protect it. The caravan worked every day except the days when the weather was bad. The trawl type was improved (anchors and hooks were added to it). For gaining efficiency the caravan trawled not the whole roadstead but only a certain waterway. Then 2 (later 3) waterway were trawled for camouflage. The bonus of 25 rubles on a crew for each trawled mine and rewards

for officers were used for increasing the trawling efficiency. About 1000 Japanese mines were trawled by Russians near Port-Arthur since April to December, 1904.

The trawling caravan organization and the systematic trawling let the Russian navy to act out the base almost till the end Port-Arthur blockade. The Russian trawling technique was high. Only 2 big Russian ships were destroyed by Japanese mines. It happened because they went out of the trawled zone. Two chalands were lost during the whole trawling.

In the whole the trawling organization and tactics reached high level and made a step to the future during the Russia-Japanese war. The trawling became an independent type of military actions.

The Japanese fleet had to decide the important and difficult problem of blockading the Russian navy in Port-Arthur during the war. The indefinite result of the fight on the 9th of February, 1904 put before Japanese fleet a problem of safety of the descent operations in Korea and on the Laodunsky peninsula. The Japanese were trying to blockade the Russian navy in Port-Arthur for solving that problem. First they tried to sink their steamer-brandies in the narrow, shallow strait between the outer and inner road steads and close the exit for Russians. Then they began to use mine obstructions. The Japanese navy began to blockade Port-Arthur since the end of April. The ironclad navy forces were acting to blockade in the beginning. The temporary Japanese base for ironclad forces was made near the Alliot islands in 40 miles away from Port-Arthur. The forces of this base moved if they were called by the blockade detachment.

The war gave a question of the navy bases guard and the navy bases defense from the sea. The Russians got larger experience in the decision of this question. Because the chief action of the sea war was near the chief Russian navy base – Port-Arthur.

The mine layers were on the patrol of the road stead at day time. The torpedo boats were on the patrol at night time and took a position for firing by torpedoes the way to the passage to the inner road stead. They were supported by a gun boat detachment and by 2 cruisers. The united system of signals

for ships and coast artillery was carried in. The additional artillery batteries were placed.

Constant service of the navy base defense from the sea like one of the every day fighting fleet activity was created with the help of vice admiral S.O. Makarov. The fiasco of the Japanese attempts to close the Russian fleet on the inner road stead proved well organized defense. The Japanese lost 21 brandsteamers during those collisions. Port-Arthur navy base defense experience was used by all leading navy powers after the war.

The navy and army interaction tactics, which was not considered well enough in all the countries, but it got a big development during the Russian-Japanese war. And the fighting sides considered different aspects of that tactics with the help of logic of war.

The approach of Japanese army to Port-Arthur put before Russian fleet a question about the coast flank army support by the artillery firing. The fight of the gun boat “Bobr” with 2 torpedo boats during the Kinchzhousky fight in May, 1904 was the first interaction experience. It showed the necessity of appropriate organization of interaction among the navy and the army. The regular use of ships for an artillery support of the army flank began since June.

The Japanese army and navy interactions was different. The navy had to support the descent army operations. The Japanese navy supported the following descent operations: in Korea in February, 1904, on the Laodunsky peninsula in May, 1904 and on Sahalin Island in June, 1905 (the last two were on the coast under enemy).

The army and navy integration tactics of this war was well elaborated and used for the first time, that was important for the navy skill development. The gained experience was widely used during the I World War.

The Russian-Japanese war was the first war of high usage of light navy forces. So their action tactics got a big development. Many new tactical methods of light forces fighting appeared during that war. The war showed an important role of those forces. The active light forces usage was the reason for the every day fighting activity of the fleets. So the fleets were in constant stress.

In conclusion it is necessary to mention a huge role of the Russian-Japanese war in development of navy skill. A new type of navy ship, the submarine was

used for the first time in this war (Petrov, 1926). Nevertheless the ideas of the general sea battle dominated in the navy theory afterwards.

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