

Operation Albion - Landings on the Baltic Islands, 1917

War in the Baltic Sea region

At the outbreak of war, the Russian fleet was in the first stage of reconstruction. Tsushima's devastating defeat in 1905 at the hands of the Japanese had robbed Russia of most of its Baltic Fleet, and the Tsar had mainly smaller and older ships available in small numbers: some obsolete ships of the line and armored cruisers that had over Schlacter. In addition, there were a large number of torpedo boats and destroyers, as well as many mining ships.

The new construction program had already begun, and the four new battleships of the Gangut class were nearing completion, gradually coming to the front. Nevertheless, the Russians were hopelessly inferior to the Germans, they could not count on fighting the sea route through the Baltic Sea against the German superiority and breaking the fashionable naval blockade. They resorted to exploiting their experience with mines gained in the Russian-Japanese war and conducting defensive operations in their protection.

The Germans, on the other hand, moved all combat-capable ships to the North Sea at the beginning of the war to repel an expected British advance. Only a few older ships remained in the Baltic Sea, mainly old cruisers and obsolete Panzerkreuzer. This weakness on both sides largely determined the course of the war. There were hardly any major battles, each side making mainly short forays into the modern area. Combat operations were limited to short, mostly indecisive skirmishes, when warships met randomly during advances. The Baltic Sea was intensively exploited by both sides in order to limit the enemy's freedom of movement and inflict the greatest possible losses on him. Submarines also played some role, but were unable to capitalize on any real benefits for either side. In winter, combat operations were not possible due to sea icing.

The situation on land had a decisive influence on naval warfare. During the crisis, the Germans inexorably advanced eastwards, gradually capturing the Russian naval bases in the Baltic States, so that the radius of action of Russian ships became smaller and smaller. Soon the fighting was concentrated on the Gulf of Riga, where the Germans tried to support and supply their attacking troops from the sea. The Russians, of course, tried to prevent this and concentrated their fleet in this area.

Kartenskizze 1

Ostsee - Übersichtskarte



Map sketch 1: Baltic Sea - overview map.

Source 5.

Angrebsplanen



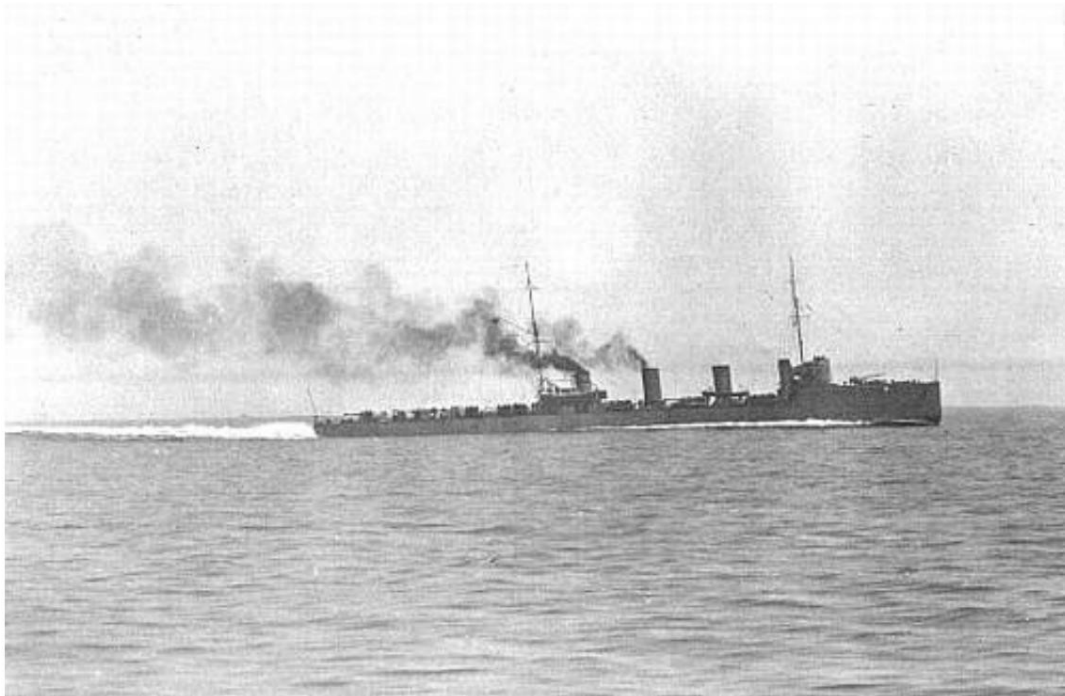
Map sketch 2: The location of the islands of Dagö, Moon and Ösel.

Source 3.

By the summer of 1917, the German army units had advanced to just outside Riga and were planning to conquer the rest of Latvia with a new attack and then pass through Estonia towards St. Petersburg

to move on. To this end, it was necessary to capture the islands of Ösel, Dagö and Moon off Estonia and Latvia in order to protect the flank of the advancing armies from Russian attacks from the sea and to support their own troops with the help of the fleet. In addition, the landing must access to the Gulf of Riga, which was blocked by Russian coastal batteries and minefields in the Irbe Strait (called Domesnäs Street on map sketch 2). To surprise the enemy, the advance had to be carried out through the mine-infested waters so that the plan would not be betrayed by previous mine clearance operations.

The commander of the Baltic forces, Grand Admiral Prince Heinrich of Prussia, dismissed the attack as impractical, but Admiral Scheer decided to do so anyway, and for this purpose Teile there High Seas Fleet stationed in the North Sea in the Baltic Sea: III. and IV. Ten Modern Squadron battleships, as well as II. Reconnaissance group with five modern small cruisers joined the Baltic forces, which consisted of three small cruisers and a minelayer. Command led Vice-Admiral Schmidt aboard the battlecruiser Moltke, which served as the landing group's flagship. In addition, there were forty-one torpedo boats and destroyers with the new small cruiser Emden (successor to predecessor sunk at the beginning of the war) as the main ship, as well as several minesweepers. and clearing boats, like the 42. Infantry division during the intersection enemy minefields. Six submarines had also been ordered to the combat area. The operation was finally decided on September 11, 1917, a week after the German troops took Riga.



The Russian destroyer Novik.

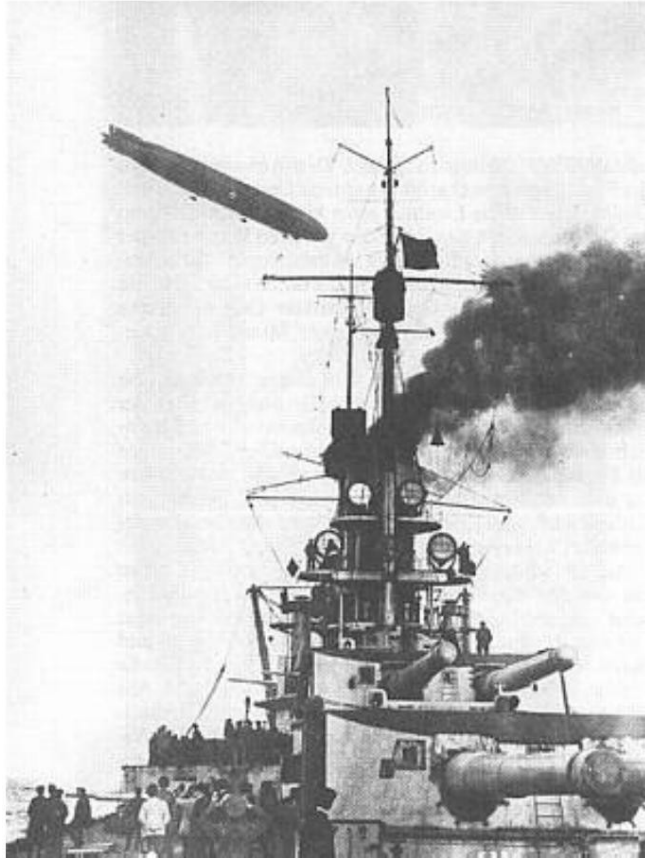
Source 1.

The Russians had the two ships of the line *Grazdanin* (formerly *Cesarevic*) and *Slava* in this sea area, to which came the two armoured cruisers *Admiral Makarov* and *Bayan*. They were commanded by Vice-Admiral *Bachirev*. In addition, in addition to the destroyer *Novik*, several were available to them:

modern *Grom*-class destroyers commanded by Rear Admiral *Stark*.

In addition, three British *C*-class submarines were located in the area. Also, the fleet had already been seized by the political upheavals in the country, there had been mutinies and high-ranking officers had been killed. Among them, the combat power and effectiveness of the formations is significant.

The landing on Ösel

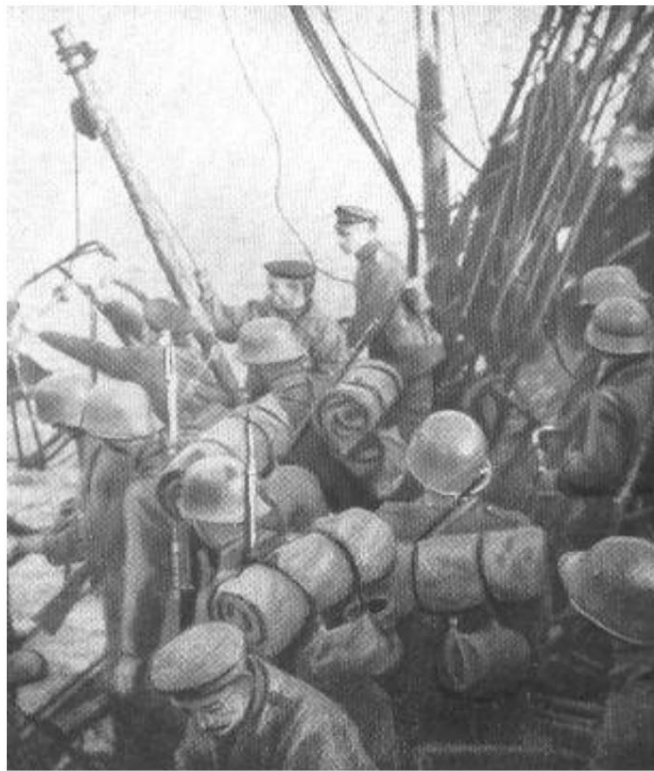


A zeppelin on a reconnaissance flight crosses
SMS Großherzogin Augusta.

Source 1.

The amphibious operation against the islands started on 11 October 1917, when the transport fleet of 19 steamers with a total of 153,664 GRT left the port of Libau. The Germans, who were approaching from the southwest during the night, had to advance slowly in order to detect and clear minefields in time. This resulted in a loss of time that disrupted the schedule, so Vice Admiral Schmidt finally ordered to go quickly into the theater of operations without the support of miners so as not to lose the surprise effect. Fortunately, there were no injuries, although the ships ran through the middle of a minefield. When the bombardment positions were taken on the morning of 12 September, the bombing forces were taken in the first place. September. In October, the battleships Bayern and Großherzogin Augusta received my hits, but they were not seriously damaged.

Soon, the German transports laid off the coast of Tagga Bay on the island of Ösel and began to land with the troops after the main ships had fought off enemy coastal artillery. 23,000 soldiers and 5,000 horses were put ashore, along with large amounts of equipment.

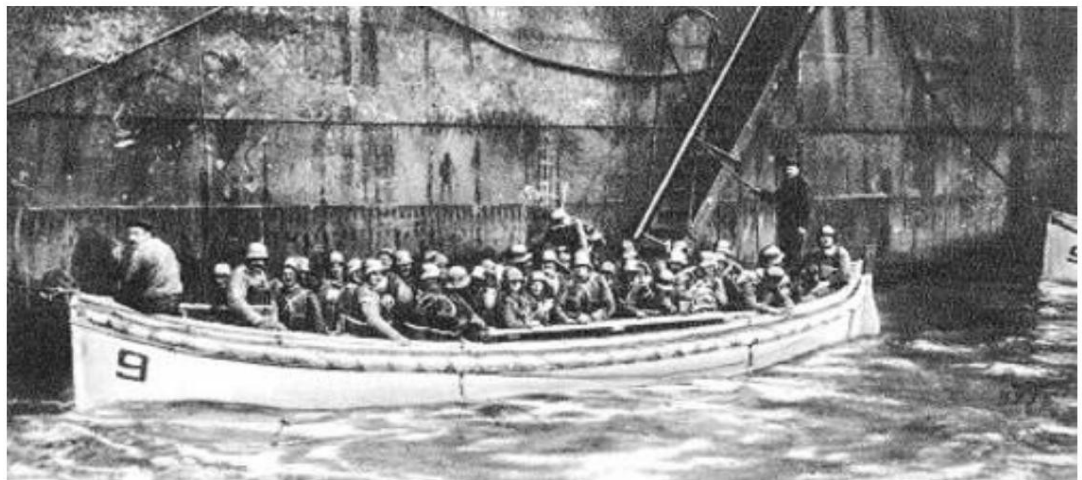


A cyclist company from the Garde-Jäger Battalion in front of Ösel. Source 3

When the Russians received news of the German landings, the two destroyers, General Kondratenko and Progranicnik, attempted to reconnoiter through Soelosundet between Ösel and Dagö against the landing fleet was driven back by bombardment of Emden.

As a result, the Russians sent the gunboat Grozhasci and the destroyers Novik, Grom, Zabijaka, Izhazlav and Desna for reinforcements, which, however, also turned away from the German ships' fire mat. The Germans counterattacked with their torpedo boats the next day, but they were driven back by the fire of heavy Russian ships.

On October 14, the Russians attacked again through Soelo Sound, this time with the destroyers Pobeditel, Grom, Zabiya and Konstantin

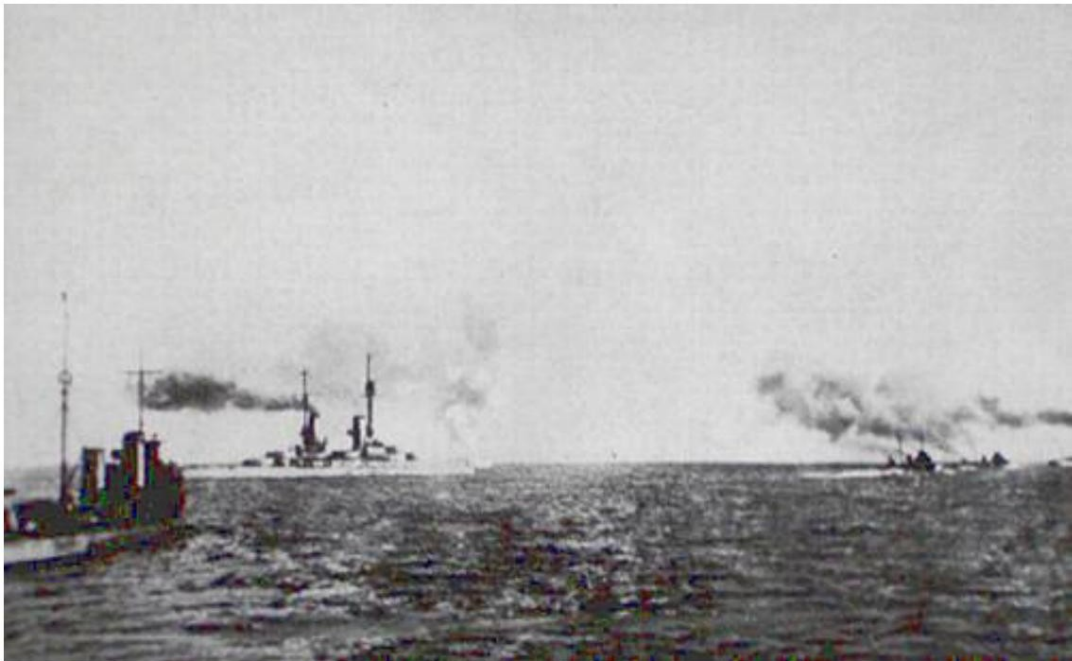


They were caught in the fire of the battleship Kaiser and II that pursued them. German torpedo boat fleets and had to return without having achieved anything. Grom was so badly damaged that she had to be abandoned and was captured by the Germans. However, she sank when she tried to tow her away. Source 2.

Battle for the Gulf of Riga

On the same day, further south, the Germans began clearing the road through the Irbe Strait between Ösel and the Latvian mainland of mines, depriving them of the three Small Cruisers of VI. Reconnaissance group and the battleships Frederick the Great, King Albert and Empress. The three main ships fired their heavy artillery at targets ashore to support the invaders in their actions. The strong Russian coastal batteries at Zerel on the southern tip of Ösel hindered the clearing work and prevented a breakthrough. The Russian ship of the line Grasdantin, accompanied by three destroyers, attempted a counterattack, but had to retreat from enemy superiority. The day before, the armored cruiser Bayan had already tried the same, with the same negative result.

16. By October, the Germans had broken through the mine barriers in the Irbe Strait, and the advancing ground troops had taken away the Zerel coastal battery. The cruisers Kolobrzeg and Strasbourg entered the Gulf of Riga and attacked the port of Arensburg on the Ösel.



*German ships I Månesund, October 1917
A Russian grenade falls near SMS Markgraf. [1](#))*

They were reinforced the next day by the battleships König and Kronprinz, which advanced towards Moonsund and there the Russian ships of the line Slava and Grasdantin as well as the armored cruiser Bayan to battle.

Slava was badly damaged by the king's fire and tried to escape. However, due to the damage, the water had penetrated the ship and increased the draught so much that it was impossible to make it possible to travel north through the shallow waters of the Moon Sound. was blocked. The ship was required to be used, under Grasdantin and Bayan mit zwei bzw. escaped a received hit to the north. Vice-Admiral Schmidt refrained from pursuing his ships so as not to attack his ships in the strong mined area



The Russian liner Slava.

After this defeat on September 18, the Russian naval command CENTROBALT abandoned the task of abandoning its position on September 18. October gave the order to clear the Moon Sound between the islands and Estonia.

After rejection on 19 September, the Commission had not yet been able to accept the report. When German troops crossed over to Dagö under the protection of Emden, the battle was decided and the Germans were able to complete the occupation of the islands on 20 October. The submarines on the sides did not come to a shot, but on a British boat, which damaged a German transport.

Aftermath

From the point of view of Germany, the landing on the Baltic islands was very successful. They had conducted a successful amphibious operation in mine-infested waters and, thanks to their own great superiority, had driven out the enemy fleet with almost no casualties of their own, and had also destroyed some enemy ships. The Gulf of Riga was now open to German shipping, and the navy was able to support the ground troops in coastal bombardments and prevent moderate supply transports. The Russians, on the other hand, had lost their forward positions on the islands and mine barriers in the Gulf of Riga and had been severely restricted in their freedom of movement.

The October Revolution, which began shortly after landing, soon completely paralyzed the Russian fleet, and also extinguished the last fighting spirit of the Russian ground troops, so the Germans destroyed gained complete naval supremacy throughout the Baltic Sea. In December 1917, the new Soviet government made peace with the Germans, who occupied the entire Baltic Sea region. With their help, the Balts managed to break away from Russia and create their own states. Finland, gripped by civil war, also liberated itself from the Soviets with German support and gained independence.

Operation Albion was the only successful German landing operation on a large scale during the war and was the largest in German history to date, but its lessons and lessons were soon forgotten. When German landing operations were again carried out or planned during World War II, no suitable landing craft or tactics were available, as an amphibious assault was possible had not taken into account . This led to the failure of the planned landing operation in England and had an unfavorable effect on the further course of the war.

Sources and additional information

1. Operation Albion: Landings on the Baltic Islands, 1917 - battlefield 1918 .
2. The seizure of Ösel, reports from the German Grand Headquarters on 15 September. and 17. XII. 17 - Archive for 1. World war.
3. Occupation of the islands of the Gulf of Riga - German Reich during World War 1 World War II 1914-18
4. Germany's High Island in World War II, Chapter 16: The Conquest of the Baltic Islands and the Conquest of Helsinki (Online-aufgabe von die Memoiren des Admirals Reinhard Scheer) - War Times Journal.
5. *Slaget om Østersøen 1917-1941-1944* af Walther Melzer, Die Wehrmacht im Kampf, Volume 24, Kurt Vowinckel Verlag, Neckargemünd 1960.

The article was written by <http://www.battlefield1918.de/history/100/> from the website Battlefield 1918. Verfasser nicht bekannt.

By Finsted

Note:

1) From the book *The World War 1914-1918 in about its harsh reality, "The Work of the Front Line Fighter"*, Munich, ca. 1925. Wikimedia, 1. World war.