Special Military History Feature: Studying the History of Coastal Defense of Countries of the Baltic Sea Region

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Mankind lives on the big and small islands and the sea is a means of the communication for people and nations. The struggle for possession of the coast is an important part of the world geopolitics.

1. What is coastal defense?

Coastal Defense is a complex of forces, means and constructed installations intended to defend naval bases, ports, military-economic and administrative centers, gulfs, straits and coastal communications against attacks from the enemy ships and sea landings. Until the middle of the 20th century Coastal Artillery was the main weapon of costal defense.

2. What is coastal artillery?

Coastal Artillery is intended to defend naval bases, islands areas and the various objects located at coast against enemy attack from the sea and from the land, as well as to assist the land forces operating at the coast. The basic Coastal Artillery mission is to disable and destroy enemy ships and boats within range of its fire; an additional mission is the destruction of land targets.

Coastal defense occupies a considerable part in the military science, politics and economy of a coastal State. The uniqueness of the study of the coastal defense history lies in the fact that it unites many branches of knowledge, science and engineering, including navy history, history of artillery, fortification, antiaircraft defense, as well as army history and other subjects. To properly study coastal defense history it is necessary to understand the basic periods of the development of coastal defense and to identify the main strategic areas on the Baltic Sea coast where coastal defenses were built.
3. The basis strategic areas of the Baltic Sea region

**Danish Straits.** Three straits (Oresund, Great Belt and Little Belt) connect the Baltic Sea and the North Sea are key strategic points in the Baltic Sea. Therefore Denmark always had a strong coastal defense. During the Second World War Germans set two 380-mm guns on Danish coast with the purpose of preventing passage of the British Fleet into the Baltic Sea.

**Aland Islands.** Aland Islands control the entrance to the Gulf of Bothnia. They were also were the most western point of the Russian Empire and only 150 km from Stockholm.

**Gulf of Bothnia.** This was the export trade route from the ports of Finland and Sweden and most trade passed through the Gulf.

**Gulf of Finland.** The Gulf was of great importance for the protection of St. Petersburg, the Capital of the Russian Empire. The coastal defense of the Gulf was always based on two coasts – Finnish and Estonian.

**Port of St.-Petersburg and the Kronshtadt Fortress.** This was the strongest fortification for the protection of St. Petersburg against attacks from the sea.

**Port of Tallinn.** In the time of the Russian Empire Revel (Tallinn) was a Russian Navy Base and a large port, as well as the location of a shipyard for the construction and repair of ships and submarines.

**Moonzund Islands and the Moonzund Strait.** This is a very important region of the Baltic Sea. Whoever owns the Moonzund Islands can control all the northern part of the Baltic Sea.

All the above mentioned regions are covered by ice in winter and are available for shipping only eight to nine months of the year, with the exception of the waters around Denmark. Therefore, warm water ports are of particular importance for the Baltic Sea.

**Irben Strait.** This is a major strait in the central part of Baltic Sea. The Strait is 32 km in width, with a depth of the fairway up to 24 meters. It is very dangerous to navigation. During the First World War it was defended by mines (more than 10000 mines). During the Soviet period coastal
artillery positions intended for the defense of Irben Strait were constructed on both coasts – the Estonian (3 batteries) and the Latvian (3 batteries).

**Port of Riga. Ust-Dvinsk Fortress.** An important port on the Baltic Sea and the second most important port in the Russian Empire. The Port of Riga had a large container terminal for the export of coal, metal and grain. It was also a naval base. Shipyards were located there. There is a large railway junction and an airport in city of Riga.

**Port of Ventspils.** Nowadays this is a large seaport for the export of mineral oil. In the time of the Russian Empire it was port for the export of grain. Then and now there is a naval port and ships for the coastal patrol are stationed there.

**Port of Liepaja.** Large coastal defense installations were built here. In the time of the Russian Empire times it was the main base of the Baltic Fleet. Later there was a Soviet Navy Base. Now it is a Latvian Navy Base.

**Port of Klaipeda (Memel).** Before the beginning of the twentieth century this was part of East Prussia. Since 1924 it is a Lithuanian port. It is a large commercial port and the Lithuanian Navy base. Shipyards are located here.

**Kalinigrad region.** Formerly the port and city of Königsberg, part of the Kingdom of Prussia and later Germany. This is a large port and a location of shipyards and the base of the Russian Baltic Fleet.

**Ports on the Polish coast.** The Polish ports of Gdynia and Gdansk (Gdansk was formerly the German port of Danzig) were of great importance for trade in the Baltic Sea Region. Shipyards capable of building warships and submarines were concentrated here.

**The Swedish coast.** Sweden on the Baltic coast had three main areas of coastal defense – the Northern area, the Central area near Stockholm, and the Southern area around the port of Norcheping. All these areas ensured the protection of main Sweden ports and sea routes for the export of Swedish iron ore.
4. The basic periods of the development of coastal defense

**The Viking Period, 800-1000 A.D.** The Vikings expanded settlements to all countries of the Baltic Sea Region. The Vikings would raid the region by means of sudden attacks of small groups with small ships. A modern version of the Viking tactics is performed by Swedish amphibian battalions.

**The Teutonic Order Period, 1200-1400 A.D.** This period is characterized by the construction of fortified castles, including many on the seacoast. The Livonian Order, an autonomous branch of the Teutonic Order, built castles located in Reval (Tallinn), Virtsu, Arensburg (Kuressaare), Riga, Ventspils, Memel (Klaipeda), etc.

**1400-1700.** During this time period construction of fortresses proceeded, many in the Baltic were built according to the system of the French engineer Vauban. In all fortresses artillery was emplaced.

**Swedish-Polish-Russian Wars.** This was the time of active military operations, both on the sea and on the land. The territory of the Baltic was annexed by the Russian Empire.

**1710-1860.** During this period the coastal artillery started to become a specialist force. Special fortresses and coastal defense forts were been constructed and special coastal was artillery developed. The most typical example of coast defense in this period was the Crimean War and defense of Sevastopol.

**1860-1914.** The equipment of coastal artillery with rifled guns began and the caliber and range of guns increased sharply. Naval mines were developed and the use of aircraft for reconnaissance and artillery spotting was begun. Communication devices and artillery fire control was developed. The use of concrete in the construction of fortifications began.

**The First World War.** Coastal defense of all countries of the Baltic Sea Region was an active part of the military operations of the war. Geopolitical changes in the Baltic Sea Region took place and the independent states of Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were created.
1920–1940. Period of Independence. Each of the new countries created its own coastal defense system. Most of the installations were taken over from the Russian Imperial period and remained in use. From 1939 – on the Soviets constructed coastal defense positions and established large fleet bases on the coasts of Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The war between the USSR and Finland took place. There were geopolitical changes on coasts of the Baltic Sea and the Baltic States were annexed by the Soviet Union.

Second World War 1939–1945. In the Baltic Sea Region coast defense installations played a role in the war. The coastal operations required a joint approach, with army, coast artillery, naval and air forces participating and cooperating.

1945 – 1961. The Cold War. All countries restored coast defense positions. New coastal batteries were built with protection against nuclear weapons taken into account. The active use of radar systems for sea and airspace monitoring, as well as for the coastal artillery fire adjustment, began. Soviet coastal batteries in Poland were built and the use of mobile artillery systems and coastal missiles began.

1961 – 1991. Cold War. Missiles in use. The slogan “Baltic Sea – the Sea of Peace” was the official position. However, it was also a period of active military measures for coast defense. The coastal defenses of all the Baltic Sea Region countries were reequipped with coastal anti-ships missiles. The stationary artillery systems were removed and antiaircraft missiles were mounted onto the positions of the old coastal batteries.

1991 – 2009. Period of Independence. In 1991–93 geopolitical changes on Baltic Sea costs again occurred. The Baltic States restored their independence. There are no new coastal batteries on the Baltic Sea coasts. Sweden removed the artillery installations from its defense systems. There are large sea-monitoring radars mounted on old sites of coastal batteries and coastal batteries have been turned into museums.

5. Future of the coastal defense

Coastal defense has passed a long way from a sword and gun to missiles and radar. All the experience of the development of coastal defense indicates that coastal protection should not be stationary. Mobile coastal
missiles systems today are well-developed. The sea-monitoring and the collection of information of the movement of ships is the main task of coastal defense today. Missiles built to strike ships can be launched from the coast, from ships, and from the aircraft. These are now general tasks for conventional armed forces and no longer a specialist branch of the forces. Today it is necessary to consider also the increase of new kinds of threats, such as the threat of international terrorism, illegal immigration, drug trafficking, and contraband shipping.

Countering these threats should be performed by several services of the state to include the military coastal defense force, a coast guard, a border guard, the police, the army, the navy and air force. The international military cooperation of all the Baltic Sea Region countries is of particular importance today.

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APPENDIX 1: German chart from Oct. 1917, RM 8-110
APPENDIX 2: German chart of Russian Defenses on Estonian coast 1917.
APPENDIX 3: Estonian coast defense chart for Tallinn 1939.

APPENDIX 4: Juminda minefields.
APPENDIX 5: Russian batteries, Saaremaa 1917.
APPENDIX 6: WWI era Russian gun on Finnish coast.