

Special Feature: Historical Document, Operations Order for German Navy for Invasion of Saaremaa, Sept. 1917

*By German Navy General Staff**

Fleet Detachment for Special Operations (RM 28-56)

25 September 1917

TOP SECRET

Copy Number 8

Operations Plan

A. The mission and assigned forces

1. The primary objective is to occupy the islands of Oesel and Moon and to close the greater Moon sound for the sea transit of enemy forces by means of a combined attack by your sea and land forces.

The Mission of the Sea Forces:

- a. Provide secure transit of army troop transports
- b. Advance to secure the Gulf of Riga as soon as possible. By means of securing the right flank of the landing corps and attack against the bridgehead at Orissar and the Moon Island, and to support the attack with all available forces.
 1. The command of the whole operation will be the responsibility of the 8th Army.
 2. The assigned naval forces includes the tactical organization of the fleet units for special operations.
 3. The Army will provide the XXIII Army Corps under General of Infanterie von Katheren. This force includes the 42nd Infantry

* translated by Dr. James Corum, Dean of Baltic Defence College

Division (Lt. Gen von Estorff) with approximately 19,000 men, 4,800 horses, 1139 vehicles (munitions wagons, supply wagons, autos and other vehicles); approximately 150 machine guns, 24 76mm field cannons, 12 105 mm light howitzers, 4 100mm long cannons, 12 150mm heavy field howitzers, 4 21cm mortars, 72 mortars (7 to 20 cm) and ammunition and supplies for 30 days. The troop force will include 666 pioneers as well as 350 landing pioneers spread among the landing force. Pioneers from Braïla will be transported on two steamers. 500 reserve pioneers will be transported from Harburg with material for construction of temporary landing wharves.

Debarkation Point: Libau. Troops travelling with the IIIrd Squadron will be brought forward by torpedo boats to the Putziger Wik. Transport orders for embarking the force will follow.

4. the transport fleet will consist of 17 steamers (Nrs. 1-16 and P) and is divided into three groups each with four ships and one group with 5 steamers. The size of the ships is generally 6-7,000 gross registered tons, with the largest 11,515 tons and the smallest 1753 tons.

Commander of the /Transport Fleet (F.d. Trans) Kapitän zur See Fuchs, who will sail on the SS. Bahia Castillo, along with Lt. General von Estorff. General of Infanterie von Kathen will sail on the “Moltke” (cruiser).

In addition to these 17 steamers there will be 2 steamers of approximately 1,000 tons (Castor and Equity—called Lithuanian steamers) which are assigned to supporting the first wave forces.

The steamer group is not large enough to ship the entire landing force with all supplies in one transit. The division will be divided, therefore, into two groups. The first group will consist of the forces immediately necessary for combat and the second group the necessary support forces. Therefore, the first group must be unloaded and the force turned around as quickly as possible.

B. Plan for the Operation

6. The two missions of the sea forces—the safe transport of the army forces and the advance as soon as possible into the Gulf of Riga – are only practical if a passage into the gulf of Riga is cleared for the heavy battle vessels and the rest of the preparatory work is completed as quickly as possible thereafter. If this is not executed, then it will not be possible for the naval forces to provide adequate support to the troop landings and the seizure of Arensburg and the attack on Moon.

Thus, the start of the operation is dependent on the mine search and clearance operations through the passage in the Gulf of Riga.

The operation will be divided into the following phases;

1st Phase: Assembly, loading and departure of the landing division. Cover for the Loeshung of the transports.

At the same time we will carry out a demonstration against the fortifications at Zerel on the day of the landing and afterwards. On the order of the XXIII Army Corps, as it advances on Zerel the firing will be repeated.

2nd Phase: As soon as Zerel falls the force will push into the Gulf of Riga in the direction of Arensburg and will support the army through the conquest of Arensburg.

Third Phase: The Moon Sound will be closed and the force will support the attack on the bridgehead at Orissar and the causeway over the Small Sund.

8. Preparations Required

a) The aviators have the order to, as soon as the operation begins, to bomb the fortifications on Sworbe, to carry out aerial reconnaissance over the Gulf of Riga, to observe the roads between Orissar and Arensburg. It is absolutely necessary to obtain the latest aerial photos from the Tagga Bay.

On no account should air operations draw attention to Tagga Bay.

b. The airships will conduct reconnaissance from the beginning of the operation over the Gulf of Riga and will carry out bombing attacks on the fortifications at Sworbe.

c. B.d.A.d.O – (Naval Operations Branch) will employ U-boats to keep the Tagga Bay under constant observation, and will determine whether the torpedo boats of the II Minesweeping flotilla can traverse at night and make a course through the (mine) barriers west of Hundsort to the Tagga Bay and then be able to employ their full force to support a breakthrough to the Gulf of Riga.

9. First Operational Phase

a. The transport of the Landing Corps on the first day of operations. In the morning the force will leave the departure ports and travel north.

First Group: The reconnaissance flotilla with special equipment will place marking buoys in the night to mark the ships passages through the minefields west of Hundsort.

Second Group: the II Minesweeping Flotilla, with its special equipment and the II Torpedo Flotilla, accompanied by the II Minesweeping Division, Castor and Equity.

Third Group: The major force consists of the flagship Battle Cruiser *Moltke* and flagship, the IIIrd Squadron, the IVth Squadron, the I.F.d. T on the cruiser “*Emden*”, VIth Torpedo Flotilla, 13th and 14th Torpedo Half-Flotillas.

On the second day of the operation the Main Force should be approximately 7 KNM north of the Tagga Bay four hours before dawn.

The first rendezvous of the IVth Squadron with the 15th Torpedo Half-Flotilla will take place on the first day of operations at sunset as that force is detached for a demonstration against Zerel.

Fourth Group: The II Barrier Breaching Group, the transport fleet, the security boats, the Aircraft mother ship *Santa Elena* (seaplane tender) the repair steamer *Stinnes*, 2 coal carriers and 3 hospital ships are all under the command of the Commander of the IInd A.G. Every group will be led by a light cruiser, and the whole force will be guarded by the boats of the 7 and 19th Torpedo Half-Flotillas. Under the direction

of the I.E.d.T will be the 13th Torpedo Half Flotilla which will consist of 16 boats and supporting aircraft. The Transport fleet will arrive at the landing point on the second day of operations one hour before dawn and stand to approximately 10 sea miles northwest by north of Cape Hundsort.

- b. The Landing at Oesel will then take place in the Tagga Bay.

It has been determined that the first wave of the landing should be in regimental strength in order to establish a beachhead and to occupy the coastal defense batteries. This must be done to allow the transport fleet to embark the men, equipment and supplies undisturbed. The first wave will be landed in three groups, to be landed as simultaneously as possible.

First Wave Group I: About 420 men carried on the naval vessels of the IIIrd Naval Group – to be landed by means of 10 motor launches.

First Wave Group 2: About 700 men transported on the boats of the IInd torpedo flotilla, to be landed by the ships boats of the IInd Torpedo flotilla and motor boats of the IInd Mine Clearance Division.

First Wave Group 3: About 2000 men transported on the Lithuanian Steamers *Borissa* (?) and *Equity*, to be landed by means of the motor boats of the IInd Mine Clearance Division and the motor launches of the First Wave.

The landing points of the First Wave will be under the control of the chief of the IInd Torpedo Flotilla, Korvettenkapitän Heinecke.

- c. The concept and goal is to land the first wave in half dawn, so that the enemy land forces can be taken by surprise. At the same time of the landing the IIIrd Group at Cape Ninnanst, and the IVth Group at Cape Hundsort, as well as the torpedo boats and the soldiers of the first wave will put the enemy field fortifications in the Tagga Bay under the strongest destructive fire possible.

- d. After the first wave reaches land, consolidates the beachhead in the bay and suppresses the enemy fortifications, the transport fleet will move in and immediately begin disembarkation operations, to begin with all ships unloading as simultaneously as possible. For the disembarkation of the soldiers and the necessary horses, we estimate three days. For the heavy equipment and supplies, we estimate five days.
- e. E. Approximately 7 steamers of the I. Squadron, after they unload, will return to Libau to return with the IInd Squadron. The unloading of the IInd Squadron will be conducted about 10 days after the unloading of the I. Squadron – the location to be determined by the progress of the operations—either in the Tagga Bay or in Arensburg.
- f. The Loeschen of the Transport steamers are controlled by the Commander of the Transport Fleet. The commander of the IInd naval group will support him with all means with the cruisers and will control the return trips of the steamers and provide escort via the cruisers and torpedo boats.
- g. For the protection of the Transport Fleet by Loeschen the force will lay an anti submarine net as quickly as possible from Cape Ninnast to Cape Hundsort.

The reconnaissance flotilla will be reinforced by fishing vessels to make sure that the Bay between Dagerort and Hundsort can be security ear the same time by means of anti-submarine/mine nets – the reconnaissance group will secure the Soelo sound. If the force is brought under fire by guns on Pamerort or near Cape Toffri (on Dagö) the ships of the IIIrd naval group and the I.F.d.T are directed to provide support.

H. The responsibility for securing the transport flotilla and the minesweeping flotilla will be given to the cruisers of the IInd Squadron with the torpedo boats of the 7th and 19th Half-flotillas as well as any heavy ships of the IVth Naval squadron

and VIth Torpedo Boat Flotilla and the 13th Torpedo Boat Half-Flotilla that will remain behind in the Tagga Bay. The rest of the naval forces will sail to the south during the night to top up their coal supplies off the Kurland coast. The large battleships will coal off of Reede, supported by the transport commander, along with the IInd Torpedo flotillas, and IInd Minesweeper Group in Libau, and the IInd Minesweeper Flotilla in Windau.

The two coal carriers supporting the transport force will remain in the Tagga Bay with the transports.

- I. At the same time that the main landing will be carried out units of the IVth Squadron, led by the cruisers Friedrich der Grosse and König Albert will make a demonstration to the Northwest to threaten Sworbe. They will be accompanied by the 15th Torpedo Half-Flotilla to protect the vessels against mines and U-boats.

Their mission: Bring the fortifications near Zerel and on Sworbe under fire, and divert the attention of the enemy to the landing that will be taking place in the North.

After completing of this mission the force will rendezvous in the Tagga Bay and the 15th Torpedo boat Half-Flotilla will be detached to Windau and assigned to the command of the B.d. A.d. O (Naval Operations Branch).

The VIth Torpedo Boat Flotilla and the 13th Torpedo Boat Half-Flotilla will top up their fuel from the battleships and cruisers. The commander of the IVth Naval Squadron will take responsibility for defense of Tagga Bay and will hold ready to carry out a further bombardment of Zerel on the order of the Fleet commander.

K. During this period the Naval operations Branch strongly insists that the clearance operations for penetrating the Gulf of Riga be pushed energetically. Before Zerel falls the effort will be along the coast of

Kurland to the East, and as soon as Zerel falls the effort will be directed on Arensburg.

10. After the army is successfully landed and established ashore the army will march with all speed in the direction of the Fettel Bay, to capture the Arensburg-Orissar Road northeast of Arensburg as quickly as possible and, with the same rapid pace, to move the troops forward against Schwolbe. The army estimates that Arensburg and Zerel can be taken by the fifth of sixth days of the operation.

10. Second and third Phases of the Operation

- a. Deployment of the naval forces at the beginning of the second phase of the operation.: In the area of Tagga Bay: Commander of the IVth Squadron with the IVth Squadron, VIth Torpedo Boat Flotilla, 13th Torpedo Half-Flotilla, commander II Group with IInd Squadron and the motor launches of the IIIrd Squadron, Transport fleet, 7 and 19th Torpedo Boat Half- Flotillas, Search flotilla Rosenberg and Net Protection Detachment (Kaulhausen).

The last named unit will return to Libau with all possible speed after completion of its mission. orders will be issued through the commander IInd Squadron.

Off the Kurland Coast

The chief of the signals detachment will be stationed with the "Moltke." The IIIrd Squadron and a torpedo boat flotilla (will be determined by orders) as act as security.

In Libau

Commander of the I.F.d.T (Transport Group) with the IInd Torpedo Flotilla, "*Nautilus*," Blockships, IInd blocking detachment

In Windau

Naval Operations Branch (B.d. A d.O.) with the cruisers of the Naval operations Branch, VIIIth Torpedo Flotilla, 20th Torpedo Boat Half-Flotilla, IInd Minesweping Flotilla.

In the Entry to the Gulf of Riga

The IInd, IIIrd and IVth Mine Clearance Divisions and the 3rd Search Half- Flotilla will carry out their work . If needed, they will be protected by the forces of the Naval operations Branch B.d.A.d.O.

- b. Intent: To penetrate the Gulf of Riga with all forces, excepting those in the Tagga Bay, to support the Army in its attack on Arenburg and later to establish a beachhead at Orissar. To block the Eastern Part of the flank approach to the Moon Sound. To clear a lane for the transports of the IInd Squadron on their sailing route from Libau to Arenburg.

c. Entry into the Gulf of Riga

Will be probably carried out with the mine search and barrier breaching detachments in the lead.

The attack on Arenburg will be supported by detached cruisers of the naval Operations Branch.

- d. The large ship force will press forward through Moon Sound will all possible speed in order to secure the right flank of the army, to secure the Moon Sound to the enemy and to threaten the enemy forces on Moon from the rear.
- e. The army estimates that the Russians stationed West of the small bay will try to occupy and hold a strong beachhead at Orissar. As a means of supporting the Army attack on this position, the A II boats of the Search Flotilla Rosenberg, along with the motor launches will transit through the Soelo Sound in the rear of Orissar. The army will occupy Pamerort as soon as possible and bring artillery ashore at Rannakull (Johanniskirche). Special instructions for the movement of the AII boats through the Soelo Sound will be issued.
- f. The commander of the IInd Naval Group will deploy the forces under him (IInd Naval Group, 7th and 19th Half-flotillas) to

support the movement of the IInd Transport Squadron to Arensburg.

- g. After the completion of its mission, the IVth Squadron in the Tagga Bay will top up its fuel. The location of the resupply will follow.

C. GENERAL

12. This operations plan is to be Top Secret.

13. Fuel will be used and controlled by all units with the utmost care. Steaming miles are to be limited to only those deemed necessary to complete the mission.

All forces will begin the operation with full fuel supplies and reserves. Whenever possible the Torpedo boat flotillas will be employed to top up the fuel supplies of the fleet.

The priority of fuel oil supplies carried by the cruisers and battleships is to supply the torpedo boat forces. All battleships and cruisers will carry additional sacked coal supplies for resupply.

14. The operation will not be begun before 30 September.

Signed Ehrhardt Schmidt

References:

Flottenverband für Sonderunternehmung, 1917 (25th Sept.).
Bundesarchiv/Militärarchiv RM 28-56.