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THE UNITED STATES AND GERMANY AT THE FINAL STAGE OF THE “UNLIMITED” SUBMARINE AND WORLD WAR

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США И ГЕРМАНИЯ НА ЗАВЕРШАЮЩЕМ ЭТАПЕ «НЕОГРАНИЧЕННОЙ» ПОДВОДНОЙ И МИРОВОЙ ВОЙНЫ

The article examines the role of German submarine warfare in the context of strategies and tactics of the First World War. The key aspects are considered, including the goals and consequences of the economic blockade organized by Great Britain, and the response actions of the German fleet. Special attention is paid to the influence of unrestricted submarine warfare on neutral powers, which became one of the factors of the US entry into the war. The article analyzes the pace of U.S. naval construction, the large-scale development of the convoy system and anti-submarine defense, which ensured the successful transfer of American troops to Europe. The article provides statistical data on the number of ships sunk and their tonnage, the dynamics of losses in maritime communications, as well as on changes in the effectiveness of German submarines under the influence of anti-submarine measures of the Allies. The diplomatic steps of the United States, which led to the cessation of the submarine war by Germany and the signing of an armistice, are particularly highlighted. Based on the work of researchers based on archival data from the period under study, the author analyzes the consequences of submarine warfare for the outcome of the World War, including the transfer of German submarines to the Allies and the completion of naval operations.

Keywords: World War I, German submarine war, German diplomacy, diplomacy of the Entente countries.

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В статье исследуется роль подводной войны Германии в контексте стратегий и тактики Первой мировой войны. Рассмотрены ключевые аспекты, включая цели и последствия экономической блокады, организованной Великобританией, и ответные действия германского флота. Особое внимание уделено влиянию неограниченной подводной войны на нейтральные державы, что стало одним из факторов вступления США в войну. Анализируются темпы военно-морского строительства США, масштабное развитие конвойной системы и противолодочной обороны, обеспечившие успешную переброску американских войск в Европу. В статье приводятся статистические данные о количестве потопленных судов и их тоннаже, динамике потерь на морских коммуникациях, а также об изменении эффективности немецких субмарин под воздействием противолодочных мер союзников. Особо выделяются дипломатические шаги США, приведшие к прекращению подводной войны Германией и подписанию перемирия. На основе работ исследователей, которые основываются на архивных данных изучаемого периода, автор анализирует последствия подводной войны для итогов мировой войны, включая передачу германских субмарин союзникам и завершение военно-морских операций.

Ключевые слова: Первая мировая война, подводная война Германии, дипломатия Германии, дипломатия стран Антанты.

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The German submarine war known as the “shadow” of the First World War [3] had the goal to break the economic blockade established by Great Britain. However, the actions of German submarines on maritime trade communications affected the interests of neutral powers, which eventually led to the entry of the United States into the World War on the side of the Entente. In response to Washington's decision, the actions of German submarines intensified and reached their apogee in early 1918. Under the slogan of the need to end the war, the United States took retaliatory steps on land and at sea.

The process of forming the American peace program and the post-war order was supported by the rapid development of military production and the build-up of the US military potential. In particular, the naval forces began to implement a development program, which was approved by Congress in August 1916 [11, p. 44]. During the three-year period, it was planned to build 10 battleships, 6 battlecruisers, 10 reconnaissance cruisers, 50 destroyers and 67 submarines. The pace of its implementation was especially intense in 1918: in January, 2 destroyers were launched at the shipyards; in February, 3 destroyers; in March, 6 destroyers; in April, 9 destroyers; in May, 4 destroyers; in June, 7; in June, 16 destroyers, in July-August, 1 destroyer; in September, 2 destroyers; in October, 1 destroyer. In addition to surface warships, the construction of submarines has been established in the United States. [8, p. 320-322].

For their part, at the beginning of 1918, German submarines opened a particularly active hunt for the ships of their opponents. In February, 68 ships (mostly British) were sunk, killing 697 passengers and crew [2, s. 87]. Now the German submarines attacked, first of all, the transport ships. However, the level of losses from underwater attacks was decreasing. If at the beginning of the “unlimited” submarine war (February-April 1917), the tonnage of sunk ships of the Entente countries reached 700 gross tons per day, then in May-June 1918. This figure decreased to 275 gross tons, although the number of German submarines involved in operations has not changed [2, s. 87]. The summer months of 1918 became quite “hot” in the ending submarine war. The most striking episode of these events was the death of the British liner Dzhustish. Despite the activity of the enemy's anti-submarine defense and their own losses, in August 1918, German submariners sank 41 British ships. Their displacement was 145.7 thousand gross tons [7, p. 72]. In September 1918 again there was an increase in the number of enemy ships sunk but the amount of tonnage destroyed decreased. In total, 48 Allied ships with a displacement of 136.8 thousand gross tons were sunk during the first month of autumn. More than 500 passengers and crew members became victims of German submariners' attacks [6, p. 667]. The German command welcomed the submarines actions but expressed concern about the decrease in the tonnage of enemy ships sunk and the increased losses of submariners. This was due to the enemy's anti-submarine actions, which became much more effective than before [8, p. 667].

In 1918, the transfer of American troops to Europe significantly accelerated. For this reason, the topic of security of transatlantic communications has become a constant and was actively discussed at special meetings of the allied Powers. As a result, the British Admiralty began to transfer transport ships to the United States. Within a short time, 188 British transports made one or more voyages from Great Britain to New York and back (calling in France) with American soldiers on board [1, p. 246]. Convoy vessels of the British Navy accompanied them, ensuring their safety. 393 destroyer squadrons and 51 convoy ocean vessels took part in escorting the transport ships [13, p. 229].

The preparation of the “American rush” to Europe, of course, attracted the attention of the political and military leadership of Germany. However, this process could not be stopped by them. The forces of the Kaiser's surface fleet have long been shackled by the Grand Fleet of the United Kingdom. Its most active part, the submarine flotilla (27 – as part of the North Sea flotilla; 16 – in the Mediterranean Sea; 4 – in the Atlantic) [2, s. 89], continued to wage an “unlimited” war on the trade communications of the North Atlantic and the Mediterranean Sea. For the most part, submarines do not have the technical capabilities to attack enemy transatlantic military transports. In addition, these facilities were provided with reliable protection by the US and British Navies. For this reason, German submarines did not conduct major operations against American convoys [12, p. 199]. Individual episodes of confrontation, often tragic for submariners of the German Navy, did not change the situation. In addition, the US Navy formed its own special units of “submarine chasers”, which were based in Plymouth (Great Britain) and Cork (Southern Ireland) [4, p. 216]. The victory in the “Battle of the Atlantic” allowed the Allies, represented by Great Britain and the United States, to deliver over 247 thousand American soldiers to Europe in May 1918 [13, p. 201]. As already noted, despite the constant presence of German submarines on the way to the western ports of Great Britain and France, the movement of military transports from overseas, thanks to the convoy system, was successful [13, p. 201]. During the spring and summer months of 1918, the transfer of American troops to Europe was the most intense. About 300 thousand troops were transported monthly [13, p. 201].

In this situation, realizing the inevitability of defeat, on October 5, 1918, the new Imperial Chancellor of Germany, Maximilian of Baden, officially appealed to the President of the United States with a request to begin negotiations on an armistice [9, p. 231]. On October 14, 1918, as part of the continuation of the exchange of diplomatic notes in which the parties discussed issues of a wide range [5, p. 399], Wilson demanded that Germany stop the submarine war while maintaining the blockade by the Allied fleet. October 21, 1918 all German submarines were ordered to immediately stop attacking enemy passenger and merchant vessels [9, p. 89]. The final order of the German Navy command was announced in a situation of catastrophic balance of forces, ensured by the participation of the United States in the anti-submarine war. To counter German submarines, the US Navy concentrated in Europe: in Scapa Flow – 5 dreadnoughts; in Queenstown – 24 destroyers and 5 auxiliary ships; in Brest – 16 yachts, 33 destroyers, 4 floating

workshops, 14 tugs; in Plymouth – 41 motor boats and 2 destroyers; in Birhoven – 6 submarines of different classes; in Cork – 36 motor boats; in the Azores – 4 submarines, 1 gunboat and 2 yachts; in Gibraltar – 2 patrol ships, 5 destroyers, 5 gunboats and 10 yachts [13, p. 199]. In addition, auxiliary vessels were involved – 73 coal miners and 4 military transports, as well as 30 air stations with 435 hydroplanes, 4 airships and 46 tethered balloons, 10 minelayers. Many ships were also intended for the installation of anti-submarine barriers [13, p. 199]. In the anti-submarine warfare in November 1918 374 American ships were to take part. Among them: 9 battleships, 3 cruisers, 70 destroyers and numerous motor boats (submarine fighters), on which 75 thousand served, which exceeded the number of personnel of the American Navy of the pre-war period. All these forces were located at 45 military bases dispersed on all fronts of the naval war [9, p. 89].

After Berlin's decision to end the submarine war, on October 23, 1918, the US government demanded the complete surrender of Germany [5, p. 399]. Emperor William did not want to stop hostilities, believing that Washington's demands were humiliating, and even dismissed General Ludendorff [4, p. 190]. However, the internal political crisis in Germany (the November Revolution), which led to the resignation of M. Baden and to the abdication of William himself, opened a new page in the history of the negotiation process [10, p.166]. On November 11, 1918, in the staff carriage of Marshal F. Foch at the Retond station (near Compiegne), the armistice signing ceremony took place. Military operations on all fronts of the Great War have stopped. According to the armistice agreement, all German submarines, without exception, were transferred to the Allies in the port of Harwich (Essex, England). 14 days were allotted for this, from the moment of signing the truce [9, p. 89]. On November 20, 1918, the Allies accepted the first batch of German submarines – 20 units. In total, 184 submarines were transferred to representatives of the victorious powers [9, p. 89]. With this, the more than four-year history of the German Empire's submarine warfare, which accompanied the land battles of the First World War, finally ended.

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