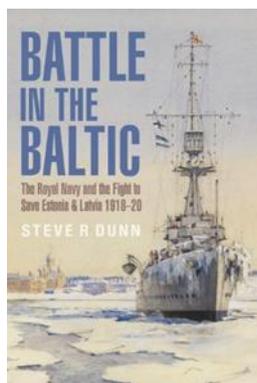


BOOK REVIEW
BATTLE IN THE BALTIC
The Royal Navy and the Fight to Save Estonia & Latvia 1918-20
Steve R Dunn
Seaforth Publishing 2021 (sb)
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Steve Dunn is a well-known author with a special interest in the Royal Navy of the late nineteenth century and the First World War. He has written on a variety of naval topics and narrative histories including works on the Dover Patrol, the Naval Blockade of Germany in WW1, the Battle for the Western Approaches in WW1 and this volume on the 'Battle of the Baltic'. Many have the impression that the First World War ended with the armistice on the 11th November 1918. Sadly this was not the case and this work is a remarkable illustration of how conflict still continued well into 1919 and beyond. Although I was aware of the operations of the Allied North Russia Expeditionary Force with British units based at Murmansk and Archangel and to an extent naval operations in the Baltic, I had no knowledge of the sustained operations by the Royal Navy in the region from November 1918 to December 1919.

Steve Dunn describes events when the Royal Navy, in extreme climatic conditions and equally extreme political positions were up against the aspirations of a myriad of conflicting parties, operated to defend the newly found independence of Estonia and Latvia. With various opposing groups such as German Freikorps, communist Red Army and Navy, White Russian forces and a highly ambiguous level of support from the British government the reader is immediately drawn into the difficulties faced at all levels in the naval force from the commander Rear Admiral Cowan to the lowest rating. Beginning with an overview of the decline of the Russian Empire and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk the narrative moves into the deployment of the 6th Light Cruiser Squadron under Rear Admiral Alexander-Sinclair who was replaced in January 1919 by Rear Admiral Cowan. Winston Churchill then War Minister was keen to stop the spread of Bolshevism but also to prevent of the Germanisation of the newly independent Baltic states. Suffice to say Lloyd George, British Prime Minister was not as keen as Churchill!

Thus the British cabinet were divided and as a consequence there was virtually no strategic guidance to the somewhat 'war weary' Royal Navy force and action/reaction was very much decided at the local level. Given the overall circumstances, that the navy had some success against Bolshevik forces including the sinking of the cruiser *Oleg*, damaging two Russian battleships, the capture of two Russian destroyers and gunfire support to Estonian and Latvian land forces in repulsing Bolshevik attacks was quite an achievement. Three VCs were won but these successes came at a cost however and submarine L55 was lost with all hands. Steve Dunn weaves personal experiences into the narrative and this brings into sharp focus the conditions that all vessels (and aircraft) and their crews were operating in with significant logistic and personnel issues to overcome (cf; Chapter 17 Mutiny!) the navy's achievement was quite remarkable in the circumstances. Despite the lack of

government support the part played by the Royal Navy is greatly remembered today in Estonia and Latvia and an uneasy peace lasted until 1939 when both countries were incorporated into the Soviet Union under a secret protocol of the Russo-German Non-aggression pact of 1939. This work is a valuable addition to the historiography of WW1 with comprehensive appendices, notes and index it definitely one for the library of anyone with an interest in the aftermath of the Great War.

Martin Willoughby