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Appointment of V. A. Kanin as Commander of the Baltic Fleet (1915): Materials from the
Russian State Archive of the Navy

Abstract

The publication on appointment of V. A. Kanin as commander of the Baltic Fleet is based on institutional approach allowing to consider the fleet headquarters as an institution, the relationships wherein influenced decision-making; and also on source study method allowing to identify features of recording information in specific historical source. Its significance springs from fact that appointment of Vice-Admiral V. A. Kanin as commander of the Baltic Fleet in spring of 1915 led to consolidation of a group of staff officers. This group contributed to his resignation in 1916 and was promotive to formation of the officers' political position. Relevance of the subject depends on two factors. The death of Admiral N. O. von Essen, who had created and nurtured the fleet, was a borderline for the naval war in the Baltic. The personality of his successor was to determine the further course of events. Another factor was position of those who could influence the decision-making mechanism, directly or indirectly. Essen gathered talented officers, but his death weakened their unity and gave rise to intrigue. The authors study how subjective factors (e.g. origin, likes and dislikes, career aspirations) influenced decision-making. Historians have paid little attention to the aspects of the Baltic Fleet headquarters functioning and to the role of personal factor therein. The publication partially closes the gap. It is to reconstruct the position of various groups of officers, their reaction to the appointment of Kanin. The authors draw on personal provenance sources — letters from V. M. Altfater, head of the naval directorate under the commander-in-chief of the armies of the Northern Front, and from Prince M. B. Cherkassky, flag-captain's assistant for operational part in the fleet headquarters, stored in the Russian State Archive of the Navy in St. Petersburg. These materials demonstrate A. V. Kolchak's interest in selection of the new commander. Cherkassky assumed that Kolchak had taken steps to achieve a result that was beneficial to him. Altfater was a possible channel of influence at the headquarters. Another group of officers was consolidating at the headquarters. M. B. Cherkassky played a prominent role in it. Given the situation, his sympathies were not on Kolchak's side and he was critical of Kanin. That was the group to take the leading position at the headquarters.

Keywords

Personal provenance sources, World War I (1914–18), Baltic Fleet, fleet staff, N. O. von Essen, V. A. Kanin, A. V. Kolchak, V. M. Altfater, M. B. Cherkassky.

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