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FINNISH FIRE-CORRECTION AND OBSERVATION STATION IN PETERHOF 1942-1943

Lt.Gen. Paavo Talvela in Peterhof early March 1942. Lt.Gen. Paavo Talvela served as liaison officer of the Finnish HQ in the German Army HQ (Oberkommando des Heeres) from February 1942. Talvela's first frontal visit was made in early March 1942 to the German 18th Army, located near Leningrad on the southern shore of Gulf of Finland. During his trip Talvela visited i. a. 50th Army Group HQ in Gatchina (where he got an invaluable souvenir, a dinner menu signed by Empress Maria Fedorovna, widow of Czar Alexander III), 122th Division HQ in Nikolskoye, 121th Division HQ in Pavlovsk and also Tsarskoye Selo. On March 7 Talvela visited Peterhof ("*from where Leningrad was clearly seen*"), and was invited to lunch in Uritskiy by his German hosts. Unfortunately no detailed report from Talvela's trip has been found. It is however very likely that Talvela made a special personal report for Marshal Mannerheim, who had repeatedly visited all above mentioned Imperial Russian castles during his service in the Chevalier Guard¹.

The purpose of Talvela's trip was of course not a tourist tour to visit imperial castles, but the go-ahead minded Talvela was most certainly informed in detail of the long-prepared operation to capture and destroy Leningrad, including envisaged participation of Finnish forces. It is not known whether establishment of a Finnish observation station in Peterhof was discussed with Talvela. After his frontal visit General Talvela was received by Hitler on 18 March, when Leningrad was one of the main topic in Hitler's speech. Two days later Talvela flew to Finland, for personal reports to Marshal Mannerheim and President Ryti.

Finnish Navy tactical plan for 1942. The Finnish Navy tactical plan for the coming shipping season was dated 17 April 1942, with basic tasks as defined by Finnish Supreme Commander Marshal Mannerheim: «destruction of remaining enemy Baltic naval forces or disabling by barring them into the bottom of Gulf of Finland, and protection of own merchant shipping from enemy attacks»².

At this moment the only remaining bases of the Soviet Red Banner Baltic Fleet (KBF) were located in Kronstadt and Leningrad (Nevskaya guba or Kronstadtskiy zaliv), on the rather vast Oranienbaum bridge-head area and in Lavansaari (the only Soviet naval base in Gulf of Finland; now Moshchnyi). As the inner parts of Gulf of Finland are rather shallow all shipping routes to envisaged operational areas went through the narrow waterway between Seivästö (Stirsudden) on the northern (Finnish) shore and Shepelevskiy lighthouse.

The Finnish Navy HQ was already 5 April 1942 transferred to Kotka, and the Coastal Brigade of Eastern Gulf of Finland (Itä-Suomenlahden Rannikkoprikaati, C. O. Col. Pekka Enkainen), and Coastal Artillery Regiment 2 (Rannikkotykyistörykmentti 2, C. O. Lt.Col. Toivo Reponen) were subordinated to the Finnish Navy Commander, Captain 1st r. (kommodori) Eero Rahola. The Finnish naval units operated in close cooperation with the German Führer der Minensuchverbände Ost (FdM Ost). The FdM Ost C. O., Kapitän zur See Kurt Böhmer arrived in Kotka on board his Command ship Gazelle 17 May 1942³.

In May 1942 the objective of the Finnish and German naval forces was thus to secure possession of Hogland and Tytärsaari⁴, hamper traffic to Lavansaari and efficiently prevent Soviet naval operations on Gulf of Finland by locking up the Soviet Fleet in the Gulf bottom. Several mine fields were correspondingly laid by Finnish and German Naval forces: In late May 1942 the Finnish Navy laid the Rukajärvi-mine field between Kotka and Hogland, and the German navy laid simultaneously the Seeigel-mine field from Hogland via Tytärsaari to Kurgolovo. These so-called defensive mine fields were successively expanded during summer 1942⁵.

In order to further hamper and prevent maritime movements in the main operational area of KBF (Kronstadt Bay) and shipping routes between Shepelevskiy and Lavansaari, so called offensive mine fields were laid at the mouth of Kronstadt Bay (Finnish Sauna- and German Tiger-mine fields), and German Brumbär-mine field from Lavansaari in the north-western direction⁶.

In order to observe enemy naval movements, several new Finnish observation stations were established in summer 1942 in Hogland (Pohjoiskorkea), Tytärsaari, Ruuskeri and Kiuskeri, and an agreement was made with the German side to send a Finnish observation group (1 officer + 2 NCOs + 5 soldiers) to Znamenka (east of Peterhof), with following tasks: Fire control of Finnish coast artillery, alarming motor torpedo boats from Koivisto and Peippiya (at Koporskaya guba, where a reserve base for Finnish motor-torpedo boats was established with fuel and torpedo storage)⁷.

Several coastal artillery batteries were subsequently dispatched to the Karelian isthmus:

— Puumala: 1 Moottoroitu Raskas Patteri, (1st Motorized Heavy Battery, Finnish designation 4/152H/37),

— Seivästö (Stirsudden): 26 Raskas Patteri (26th Heavy Battery, 4/152/45C),

— Jukkola: 29 Raskas Patteri (29th Heavy Battery, 3/152/45C),

— Kellomäki (now Komarovo): 28 Järeä Patteri (28th Super Heavy Battery, 3/254/45D), arrived later.

— several fire positions were prepared between Jäppilä and Ino (now Privetninskoye) for 1st Railway Battery, with up to four T-1–180 war booty railway guns captured in Hanko (4/180/57 NRaut).

Osasto Pajanen (Detachment Pajanen) in Peterhof from 16 May 1942 to 25 January 1943. In May 1942 the Finnish fire control and maritime observation station, subordinated to Rannikkotyökistörykmentti 2 (RTR2), was dispatched to Peterhof at the German-occupied southern shore of Kronstadtskiy zaliv. The tasks included fire-direction of 1st Railway Battery, later also 28. Super Heavy Battery in Kellomäki, and maritime observation of traffic in the sea channel from Leningrad to Kronstadt⁸. Specific targets mentioned were Soviet big ships and area targets like MTB-, submarine- and minesweeper-bases in Kronstadt⁹.

The station was headed by Lt. Kasper Pajanen, intelligence officer of 1st Railway Battery¹⁰, and was located in the tower of the Orthodox Holy Peter and Paul Cathedral in Peterhof. The observation level was thus some 86 m over sea level, with shortest distance to Kotlin Island only 12,5 km. Although the cathedral was located only some 500 m from the front line at the eastern border of Oranienbaum encirclement, it was considered relatively safe because of the exceptionally strong structure of the Cathedral (only 305 mm projectiles could penetrate the walls). Climbing to the observation level was not easy, a rope ladder had to be used at the top. Quartering conditions in the lower part of the cathedral were rather cold and primitive.

Regular radio contacts were taken to RTR2 in Koivisto. The selected personnel (in addition to Lt. Pajanen one radio NCO, one observation NCO and four observation soldiers) departed 11 May 1942 by aircraft from Helsinki to Tallinn. Special equipment for the station included:

— a direction finder and two Zeiss-Binocular 7 x 50 binoculars,

— 1:50.000 topographical maps "Kronstadtskiy zaliv", "Oranienbaum" and "Leningrad" etc. (of which at least *joista ainakin* "Kronstadtskiy zaliv" was very accurate), and 1:20.000 air photo map (based on photographs taken summer 1941)¹¹.

— A long-distance camera with 70 cm focal length. As no own photo laboratory existed in Peterhof, all negatives were sent to Finland for development¹².

Pajanen's group arrived 13 May 1942 via Narva and Krasnogvardejsk (now Gatchina) to Znamenka. Upon arrival Pajanen established contacts with

Batterie Blücher/Marineartillerieabteilung 530 (MAA 530) and with field artillery unit Schweres Artillerieregiment 802, with had a separate observation station in the cathedral¹³.

Osasto Pajanen started its activities on 16 May 1942. Two so far unidentified "high Finnish officers" visited Peterhof 3 June 1942, observing how German Schweres Artillerieregiment 768 fired 40 grenades against Kirov factory in Leningrad¹⁴. On 10 June 1942 the Finnish Navy Operative Department sent Lt. Pajanen a list of coordinates for 10 planned targets of the Railway Battery. The list started with Fort Riff, and ended with Kotlin Island electrical power station¹⁵. The target list was continuously updated based on observations made, and 21 September 1942 Lt. Pajanen compiled an accurate list of 14 target coordinates (ship classes, ships and anchor locations, including battleship Marat and destroyer Minsk)¹⁶. Air surveillance was added to the station's task 11 August 1942, but the closed space in the cathedral did not permit observation of the entire sky, and only a few local flights very observed. On 12 October 1942 also meteorological observations were added to the task list. Because of lack of skilled personnel and necessary equipment the observations were not very accurate.

Cooperation with German MAA 530 was rather moderate, and the Germans were somewhat surprisingly mainly interested in preventing Soviet supply traffic to Kronstadt, not identifying the vessels observed. Regular contacts were kept with the Finnish MTB-base in Peipiya, from where a wind-driven battery charging-device was received in October 1942 (batteries were earlier charged in German Batterie Blücher)¹⁷. As the rotating propeller arose the enemy's attention, the device was repeatedly damaged. The Finns were invited to Kamradenschaft evenings of the German garrison in the Znamenka Erholungsheim, and took also contacts to the Finnish-speaking Ingrian local population.

In October 1942 more powerful R-12-51 (DR38) and R-12-14 (Telefunken) radios, a efficient telescope and a second direction finder were received. As neither Kronstadt nor Leningrad were fired upon from the Finnish side, the "fire correction" unit did not get any experience of its prime tasks. After repeated observations of German artillery fire against Kronstadt, Pajanen draw the conclusion that he will not be able to send appropriate correction information for the heavy battery in Kellomäki, because of his unfavourable location 12-15 km from the target, with only insignificant deviation from the sighting line. Furthermore the Russians were emitting thick fog and smoke screens over the targets very quickly, in only 3-5 minutes after first shell impacts. All ships were also immediately moved to new anchor locations covered by the thick fog screen.

The main reason for the lack of activity of the Finnish artillery batteries is most likely political — with a high degree of probability it can be assumed

that Marshal Mannerheim did not permit any activities which might have been interpreted as offensive actions against Leningrad, although proofs of this assumption have not yet been found. The activity of Osasto Pajanen ended as the Gulf of Finland froze over on 25 January 1943, and the personnel returned to Finland via Estonia.

Osasto Granbohm in Peterhof from 10 May to 28 November 1943. During 1943 shipping season the tasks of the Finnish Coastal Forces was defined as follows: "Main tasks of our naval forces during shipping season 1943 are prevention of enemy naval operations, protection of own sea traffic from enemy attacks, and support to own forces when resisting enemy attacks."¹⁸

In spring 1943 a new Finnish observation group was sent to Peterhof, headed by 2st Coastal Regiment intelligence officer, Lt. Torsten Granbohm. The observation group was active from 10 May to 28 November 1943¹⁹. In 1943 the station was no longer named "fire direction station", as all activities were connected to maritime observations. In Granbohm's own short reminiscences published in 1953, he mentioned even Peterhof as a practically peacetime "coastal guard" station²⁰.

The activities continued like in 1942, with consideration of Lt. Pajanen's experience and development proposals. The quartering conditions were now somewhat improved, and a sauna was constructed in an empty former store house. Some Finnish visitors arrived in Peterhof in summer 1943: at the end of June military pastor Jussi Tenkku and his lotta-wife visited Peterhof during the evacuation of local Ingrian population to Finland²¹, and in August 1943 military correspondent Pauli J. Wirola took 48 photos in Peterhof. Wirola was apparently not allowed to write anything about his visit, but his photos are now available in the SA-kuva photo archive, which also includes 23 photos taken by Lt. Pajanen in 1942 (of which one batch is wrongly identified; "Petroskoi" instead of "Pietarhovi").

No long-distance photos taken in Peterhof have been located, and seem to be destroyed (or evacuated to Sweden during the Stella Polaris-operation). As mentioned there was no photo lab in Peterhof, but several pencil sketched of observed ships can be found among preserved documents. Granbohm inspected the Finnish air surveillance station in Kurgolovo 28–20 September 1943, because Finnish Navy was not satisfied with the quality of reports from Kurgolovo. One week later he sent new maritime observation instructions to Kurgolovo²².

End of operations. In autumn 1943 artillery activity from the Oranienbaum area grew considerably. Protected by smoke screens the Russians started to perform forciful POW-snapping, and on 21 November 1942 the main road from Peterhof to the south was cut. On 24 November 1943 Lt. Granbohm transmitted: «according to German information Second Assault Army, commanded by General Romanovski, has arrived in Oranienbaum... A major

attack from both directions, from east and from west is expected. Evacuation preparations continue²³. Next day Lt. Granbohm was ordered to stop the operation of the observation station, and to return to Finland²⁴.

On 27 November 1943 all activities ceased. Granbohm sent a radio message that all transports are overloaded, but he will try to arrange evacuation transport of the Finns next day, and to keep his radio transmitter online until his own departure. Two days later Lt. Granbohm informed that he will switch off the radio, and is ready to depart at any moment²⁵. It is a virtual wonder that Osasto Granbohm was able to depart before the Red Army liberated Peterhof. The Russians started already 5 November 1943 to transport considerable forces to Oranienbaum. The 2nd Assault Army had been replenished after its big losses in June-July 1942 in the swamp areas southeast of Leningrad. It can be noted that the former Commander of 2nd Assault Army, later leader of the Russian Liberation Army (ROA)

During Lt.Gen. Andrei Vlasov's frontal trip to Gatchina in early May 1943 he boosted to his German hosts that he is able to capture Oranienbaum bridgehead and Kronstadt fortress! Vlasov's overenthusiastic invitation to the German officers to arrive to St.Peterburg after HE had captured the city, caused a scandal in the German nazi party leadership. All further frontal visits by Vlasov were prohibited, and he was practically subject to house arrest in Berlin²⁶.

It is remarkable that the Finnish observation station in Peterhof did not notice any change of the situation in Oranienbaum before the above mentioned message 24 November 1943. The voluminous troop transports were efficiently masked, and only "usual" training and disturbance activities were observed. In fact some 53 000 soldiers, 2 300 trucks and tractors, 240 tanks, 700 cannons etc. were transported to the Oranienbaum area before 21 January 1944.

On 14 January 1944 the major attack by 2st Assault Army was initiated eastwards from Oranienbaum, and next day the 42th Army advanced westwards from Pulkovo. Less than one week later, 20 January 1944 the attacking Soviet forces met at Ropsha. All German troops were forced away from the southern shore of Gulf of Finland between Peterhof and Strelnja-Uritsk. Already 30 January 1944 the Red Army had liberated all German-occupied territory east of Kotly and Kingisepp. The Finnish high command faced thus a new, extremely serious strategic situation, which was furthermore demonstrated by the major bombing attacks against Helsinki by ADD in February 1944.

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¹ Kansallisarkisto (далее: КА). Talvela's collection Pk 1542/26.

² Finnish Navy operation plan 1942, Oper.Dept. KD No. 1310/Op.2, 17.4.1942 (КА. T15758/1190). Acceptance by Supreme Commander Marshal Mannerheim 26.4.1942, and Realisation Order 5.5.1942 (КА. PM/Oper.Dept. spk 20920).

³ Müller W. Kriegsschauplatz Ostsee 1919–1945. Band 5 (1942). Köln, 2018. S. 286.

⁴ Hogland was captured by Finnish troops 28.3.1942. Tytärsaari is captured by Finnish troops 9.4.1942, who then withdraw after handing the island over to German troops.

⁵ Suomen laivasto 1918–1968. Os. 2. Helsinki, 1968. S. 80–84. Müller W. Kriegsschauplatz Ostsee 1919–1945. S. 289–296.

⁶ Suomen laivasto. S. 84–86.

⁷ Peippiya naval base was founded by KBF in October 1939. Finnish MTB-base establishment: Suomen laivasto. S. 85; Orvo Peuranheimo ym. Laivat puuta, miehet rautaa — moottoritorpedoveneiden taistelut Suomenlahdella 1941–1944 (1956), page 98

⁸ КА. T5769/20. Special instructions for Peterhof fire-direction group 6.5.1942.

⁹ Idid. Activity report of Peterhof observation station 5.5.1942–5.1.1943; 30.3.1943.

¹⁰ Kasper Pajanen (1919–2013; 1st Railway Battery intelligence officer 1942, 1st Railway Battery fire-direction officer 1943). Dipl.Ing. 1945, afterwards leading positions in Heavy Industry.

¹¹ КА. T5769/20 Activity report of Peterhof observation station 5.5.1942–5.1.1943; 30.3.1943; КА. T5775/8. Map covering letter 22.8.1942.

¹² Ibid. T5769/20. Special instructions for Peterhof fire-direction group 6.5.1942/

¹³ Batterie Blücher/MAA 530 was 2 x 150 mm railway battery. See: *Harnier W. von. Artillerie im Küstenkampf. München 1969. S. 76.*

¹⁴ Центральный архив Министерства обороны РФ. Ф. 500. Оп. 12480. Д. 300. Л. 75. Red Army Intelligence Administration, 4. Dept. German warbooty documents collection: Schwere Heeresartillerieabteilung 768, war diary (Russian translation).

¹⁵ КА. T5775/8. Target list, 1st Railway Battery.

¹⁶ Ibid. T5775/9. Target list, Lt. K. Pajanen 21.9.1942.

¹⁷ Ibid. T5769/20. Special instructions for Peterhof fire-direction group 6.5.1942.

¹⁸ Ibid. T16234/1688. Instructions for Coastal troops for 1943, Navy HQ, Op.Dept. KD No. 1056/Op.3 1.4.1943.

¹⁹ Captain 2nd rank Torsten Granbohm (1917–1991) served after the war in Finnish Naval Signal troops until 1977.

²⁰ *Granbohm T., Tiilikainen M. Karjalan kunnailta Pietarhovin pihaille // Tyyntä ja myrskyä: Taistelutarinoita rannikolta. Helsinki, 1953. S29–32.*

²¹ Inkeriläisiä siirtämässä — Jussi ja Liisa Tenkun päiväkirjat 1943–1944. Helsinki, 2008. S. 117.

²² КА. T5775/9. Mission of Lt. Granbohm to Kurgolowo observation station 28–29.10.1943.

²³ Ibid. T5775/4.

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ Ibid. T5775/10. RTR2. Peterhof observation station. Teleprinter messages of Osasto Granbohm 1943.

²⁶ Geust C.-F. Vlasovin armeija — Stalinin sotilaat Suomen palveluksessa. Juva, 2017. S. 17–19, 108–110. Strik-Striekfeldt Wilfried: Against Stalin and Hitler, Macmillan 1970. P. 134–136. Schröder, Mathias: Deutschbaltische SS-Führer und Andrej Vlasov 1942-1945, Ferdinand Schöningh 2001. P. 146–147

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