

PAPER • OPEN ACCESS

Geographical and statistical descriptions of the Murmansk coast of the Barents Sea, made by Russian officers of the General Staff and Navy in the XIX – early XX centuries

To cite this article: A A Mikhailov and M N Sosnina 2019 *IOP Conf. Ser.: Earth Environ. Sci.* **302** 012009

View the [article online](#) for updates and enhancements.

Geographical and statistical descriptions of the Murmansk coast of the Barents Sea, made by Russian officers of the General Staff and Navy in the XIX – early XX centuries

A A Mikhailov and M N Sosnina

Peter the Great of St- Petersburg Polytechnic University, Saint Petersburg, Russia

dragun66@mail.ru

Abstract. The paper considers geographical and statistical descriptions of the Murmansk coast of the Barents Sea, prepared in the XIX – early XX centuries by officers of the Russian General Staff and Navy, analyzes the contribution of military and navy specialists in the study of polar and circumpolar territories of the Russian North. Already in the 1820s, research on the Murmansk coast was also carried out by officers-hydrographers of the Navy Department, whose purpose was to clarify map and establish sea routes. In the 1830s and 40s, military geography and military statistics were formed in the Imperial Military Academy (later the General Staff Academy) as separate branches of knowledge. The latter fulfilled the functions of a generalizing science, the purpose of which was to analyze from a military point of view the widest possible range of data (geographical, demographic, economic, etc.) on a particular territory. Following this principle, the officers of the General Staff, who in the 1840-60s were making military and statistical reviews of Arkhangelsk province, which included the Murmansk coast (L.L. Shtyurmer, A.E. Zimmerman, N.N. Kozlov, and others), tried to make the description of the complex character. A new impulse for the study of the Murmansk coast by military experts was given in the 1880s by the idea of creating a naval base in the Barents Sea, which would provide the possibility of a cruising war against Britain or other strong maritime power. In general, in the XIX – early XX centuries, military specialists made a significant contribution to the study of the Murmansk coast, the collection and synthesis of information on geography, hydrography, ethnography of the Murmansk coast and the Russian North as a whole,

1. Introduction

Military-geographical and military-statistical descriptions of various territories of the Russian Empire and foreign countries, made in the XIX – early XX centuries by officers of the General Staff and Navy, were not only of a great military importance, but also were a significant contribution to the development of a geography, ethnography, sociology, and a number of natural sciences.

Theoretical principles and fundamentals of the methodology of military geography and military geography and military statistics were developed in the 1830s and 40s at the Imperial Military Academy (later – the General Staff Academy) by P.A. Yazykov, G.F. Stefen, F.F. Mets, D.A. Milyutin, and others.

2. Main body

In addition, Dmitry Alekseevich Milyutin (1816-1912), an outstanding scientist and statesman, made a particularly notable contribution to the development of statistics, which he defined as a generalizing science that analyzes, from a military point of view, the most extensive range of information about a



Content from this work may be used under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/). Any further distribution of this work must maintain attribution to the author(s) and the title of the work, journal citation and DOI.

particular territory, its geography, nature, resources, population, etc. [1, p.4]. D.A. Milyutin in the 1840s also developed an algorithm of military and statistical description, which was followed by officers of the General Staff, with some additions, until the beginning of the 20th century.

Naturally, the military department focused its attention primarily on the territories that were most likely to become theatres of war. The Russian North did not belong to such territories in the first half of the XIX century. But the coast and waters of the Arctic Ocean attracted attention of the sailors who were concerned about compilation of accurate hydrographic descriptions of the marine domains of Russia. In the early 1820s, several hydrographic expeditions to the Arctic Ocean took place, led by the famous navigator and researcher F.P. Litke (1797-1882). The results of the observation were published in Litke's book “A Fourfold Journey to the Arctic Ocean” [2].

In 1826-1832, the expedition to the Barents Sea, led by hydrographer M.F. Reineke (1801-1859), took place. Already in 1826, he made a detailed description of the Kola Bay, the Tuloma River, the island of Kilding, and the Murmansk coast up to the borders with Sweden. In 1830, in the printing house of the famous public figure and publicist N. Grech, a book with a description of the city of Kola and the Kola Bay, compiled by Reineke [3], was printed. Naturally, the author focused on geographical and hydrographical characteristics in the region, but there were economic, statistical, and ethnographic data in the review.

In 1837, a group of military specialists headed by Lieutenant General L.L. Zeddeler proceeded with the publication of the “Military Encyclopedic Lexicon”. The first volume included the article “Arkhangelsk Province”, which was prepared by the officer of the General Staff L.L. Shtyurmer (1809-1883) [4]. Following the principles developed at the General Staff Academy, he characterized the geography of the province, its administrative division, composition of the population (including ethnic composition), routes of communication, economy, made small essays on individual settlement (Arkhangelsk, Kola, Mezen, Onega etc.), gave data from the history of the northern territories.

Shtyurmer emphasized severity of natural conditions on the Murmansk coast and islands. For example, he wrote about Novaya Zemlya: “Novaya Zemlya is a terrible, icy desert, explored no more than twenty versts along the coast. In this space, it is only bare stone everywhere” [4, p.604]. Nevertheless, he pointed out that the North was rich with natural resources, first of all, with fish and sea bears, and wrote that the government should take measure for a more modern and efficient organization of their catching. The author practically did not mention the military actions on these harsh lands are unlikely to take place.

In 1847, the Department of the General Staff of the War Ministry began to publish a multi-volume “Military and Statistical Review of Russian Empire”. In 1853, the 1st part of 2nd volume was published, which was devoted to Arkhangelsk province and included, among other things, a description of the Murmansk coast and the Barents Sea islands [5]. The description was made by A.E. Zimmerman (1825-1884), the captain of the General Staff (later general from infantry), who later proved himself both as a geographer and as brave combat commander (during the Crimean War of 1853-1855).

In the introduction to his work, A. Zimmerman noted that the probability of Arkhangelsk province becoming a theater of war is low. If the enemy attacks it after all, the attack will be carried out by the Navy. Zimmerman asserted that “Arkhangelsk province may become a theater of war only if (at present, of course, it is impossible) Russia is forced to wage a defensive war in the north, i.e. in the event of a breach with any of the strong maritime powers and the emergence of a fleet of the latter in the waters of the North Ocean and the White Sea. <...> The main warfare in Arkhangelsk province can take place only at sea and have the goal of mastering Arkhangelsk province by the enemy and maybe some other coastal points of less importance” [5, p.1-2]. It is interesting that just a few years after the book was published, during the Crimean War, in 1854, an enemy (Anglo-French) fleet actually appeared in the White Sea, the actions of which, however, were limited to bombing the Solovetsky Monastery and Kola. The scale of the warfare was small, and the enemy made no attempts to occupy Arkhangelsk.

Considering the geographical characteristics of Arkhangelsk province, Zimmerman paid special attention to the Murmansk coast of the Barents Sea, its bays and gulfs, as well as the islands lying in the sea. As L. Shtyurmer did before, Zimmerman noted the severity of the natural conditions of the area

under consideration. “the Murmansk coast, - wrote the officer, - is wild and gloomy, it consists of granite cliffs and rocks piling up on one another” [5, p.22]. Nevertheless Zimmerman, as well as many of his predecessor, highly appreciated the natural resources of the North and the prospects for the development of fishing and sea beast hunting.

Zimmerman paid a lot of attention to the population of Arkhangelsk province, he describe separately and very thoroughly the activities and customs of the Russian Pomors, Laplanders, Zyrians, etc. The author was clearly keen on ethnography and gave details even about the national cuisine of the peoples. It is interesting that, characterizing the Russian population of the region with great affection for its steadfastness and diligence, he did not keep silent about the problems in the relations between Russians and other “tribes” of the North. Zimmerman asserted: “It is only thing worthy of condemnation in the Russian inhabitants of the Northern Territory – their attitude to other tribes: the Samoyede, the Laplanders, and the Karelian; being smarter than them and more cunning, they keep them under oppression, deceive them, and use their goodness and trustfulness in evil” [5, p.141].

In 1859, when the publication of the “Military and Statistical Review of the Russian Empire” had come out, the publication of the “Military and Statistical Review of the Russian Empire” had come out, the military department began to publish a new multi-volume edition – “Materials for geography and statistics of Russia, collected by officers of the General Staff”. The volume dedicated to Arkhangelsk province was published in 1865, prepared by captain of the General Staff N.N. Kozlov [6]. The author used the works of A.E. Zimmerman, hydrographers (including E.P. Litke and M.F. Reinrke), which he supplemented with information from the works of civilian geographers, ethnographers, statisticians, etc.

The material of this rather extensive study is divided into seven large chapters: “Territory”, “Population”, “Industry” (by this we mean the economy as a whole), “Education” (of the population of the province), “Private and public life of the residents”, “Management”, “Description of cities and other wonderful places”. Besides, in the introduction, N.N. Kozlov gave a brief outline of the history of the territories of the history of the territories occupied by Arkhangelsk province.

It is interesting to note that the actual military information in the publication was very limited (mainly to the composition of the deployed troops). For the most part, they were of a secret nature and were sent to the military leadership bodies. However, the published information was also regarded by the author as necessary for the analysis of the province’s military potential.

In the chapter “Territory”, the author considered, apart from the lands of the province, the White Sea and the Arctic Ocean and in separate paragraphs he gave information about the local shipbuilding and navigation in the North. He even described certain types of coast-dwellers’ vessels: sloops, rowboats, karbasses, kochmaras, etc. [6, p.35-36].

The author described in detail the Murmansk coast of the Barents Sea and its bays. A rather detailed description of Novaya Zemlya is given. N.N. Kozlov even expresses an opinion about its geological origin, but does not see any prospects for the development of these remote areas of the Russian Empire [6, p.27].

N.N. Kozlov in his work describes in detail the population of the province, and separate ethnic groups (Pomors, Zyrians, Laplanders etc.) have their own independent essays. The author made an attempt, along with economic and demographic characteristics, to describe the moral qualities of various “peoples” and their customs.

In general, the description of the province, including its circumpolar territories, is really of a complex nature in the work of N.N. Kozlov, contains a lot of valuable information on geography, hydrography, statistics, demography, etc.

In the 1860s, in the course of major military reforms in Russia, a system of military districts was created. Their staffs, along with other duties, were to compile and regularly update military and statistical reviews of the territories their jurisdiction. Arkhangelsk province with its circumpolar territories was a part of the vast St. Petersburg Military District. Its military and statistical review, compiled under the guidance of the Chief of the Military District Staff, general N.I. Bobrikov, was published in 1884.

The authors of the review noted that there are a lot of convenient anchorages on the Murmansk coast, but the conditions of navigation in the Arctic Ocean were assessed as poorly known and difficult [7, p.124]. The publication also mentioned the small number of inhabitants of the Northern territories and an almost complete absence of fortified sites on them.

The authors believed that the severity of nature and the lack of people have some positive aspects, because they prevent the landing of enemy troops [7, p.38]. It was noted in the review that if a hostile fleet appeared in the northern waters, it would most likely undertake bombardments of a few coastal settlements as the British and French did during the Crimean War.

Characterizing the population, the authors of the review not only described its composition, activities, and everyday life, but also assessed the qualities of men as a conscript contingent. The natural resources of the region were also scrutinized.

In the 1880s, due to the fact that Russia had extremely strained relations with several leading European countries at once, Russian military leaders began to actively develop plans to establish naval bases that would provide the imperial fleet with access to the ocean. Among the most promising areas in the respect, many experts referred Murmansk coast of the Barents Sea with its ice-free bays [8]. The search for a place for the base and discussions that took place gave a strong impulse to the study of the Northern territories and waters by military and naval specialists. Consequently, in 1883, the article by naval officer M. Kozlov “A few words about the importance of the Murmansk coast in hydrographic and maritime terms” was published in the journal “Marine Collection” [9].

Among active supporters of creating a military port in Murman there were a well-known at the time publicist, retired naval officer A.E. Konkevich who acted under the pseudonym of “Belomor”, shipbuilder M.I. Kazi, editor of the journal “Russian Navigation” M.F. Mets and other [10]. The press began to have many publications about the Murmansk coast, including those prepared by the military.

In the summer of 1894, the Murmansk coast was visited by the Minister of Finance S.Y. Witte, who then presented to Emperor Alexander III a plan of building a military port on the banks of the Catherine harbor of the Kola Bay in the Barents Sea. Alexander III approved the project, but the death of the monarch violated the plans of the supporters of the northern naval base. The new Emperor Nicholas II considered the construction of military port in Libava in the Baltic Sea to be more important, while the construction of a commercial port, rather than a military one, began in the Catherine harbor in 1896.

However, the interest of the maritime and military authorities in the North did not fade out. In 1896, the War Ministry sent Rear Admiral A.K. Sidensner to the Murmansk coast, who inspected the lighthouses being built there and got acquainted with the living conditions and economy on the shores of the Barents Sea. The book published following the results of the trip “Information about the Murmansk coast” by Sidensner contains extensive data on the geography and climate of the region, hydrographic data, characteristics of local economic life. In addition, the author included in the work his recommendations for solving the economic problems of the Russian North, reviving its industry and trade, including though the construction of communications, which would connect the northern outskirts of the Empire with its center.

3. Conclusion

At the beginning of the XX century, military specialists continued the study of the territories of Russian North and, above all, the Murmansk coast. In 1909, a new work by A.K. Sidensner “Description of the Murmansk coast” was published, which included extensive material on the geography, resources, and economy of the region.

Summing up, during the XIX – early XX centuries, Russian military and naval specialists did a lot of work to study the territories of the Russian North, compiled their military-statistical and military-geographical reviews. Aiming to take into account the widest possible range of factors that can affect the military potential of the territory, the officers of the General Staff and Navy carried out a comprehensive study of the Arctic and subarctic territories, collected information of geographical, demographic and ethnographic nature. As a result, military specialists made a significant contribution to the study of the northern lands and waters, This contribution is not diminished even by the fact that

the plans to create a naval base in the Arctic Ocean developed at the end of the XIX century began to be implemented only after the outbreak of the World War I, when the city of Romanov-on-Murman – Murmansk (1915) was founded

References

- [1] Milyutin D A 1847 *First experiments in military statistics by D A Milyutin, Colonel of the General Staff, professor of the Imperial Military Academy. Book 1.* (St. Petersburg; Typography of military) 248 p.
- [2] Litke F P A 1948 *Fourfold Journey to the Arctic Ocean on the military brig “Novaya Zemlya” in 1821-1824.* (Moscow: Geografiz) 335 p.
- [3] Reineke M F 1830 *Description of the island of Kola and the Russian Laplandia* (St. Petersburg, N. Grech's printing house) 58 p.
- [4] Shturmer L 1837 *The Arkhangelsk province // Military Encyclopedic Lexikon. Part 1* (St. Petersburg. Printing house of the Imperial Academy of Sciences) P.598-605.
- [5] Zimmerman A E 1853 *The Arhangelsk Province // Military and Statistical Review of the Russia Empire, published by the highest order of the 1st Office of the Central Staff Department. Vol 2 Part 1* (Petersburg. Printing house of the Department of General Staff) 282 p.
- [6] Kozlov N 1884 *The Arkhangelsk province // Materials for geography and statistics of Russia, collected by officers of the General Staff. Vol 39* (St. Petersburg: E. Weimar'printing house 1865) 400 p.
- [7] Bobrikov N I *Military and statistikal review of the St. Petersburg Military District.* St. Petersburg. Printing house of the guards and St. Petersburg Military Distrikt) 617 p.
- [8] Mikhailov A A 2016 *Problems of Naval Deployment in the Arctic (1880-1890) // Military Historical Journal. Issue 5.* P.10-17.
- [9] Koslov M A 1883 *A few words about the importance of the Murmansk coast in hydrographik and maritime terms // Marine Collections. Issue 9.* P.21-27.
- [10] Mikhailov A A 2016 *A.E. Konkevich-Murmanskiy about the Russian military outpost in the North // Murmansk in the history of the Russian statehold. Collections of reports of the international scientific-practical conference (Ekaterinburg. Publishing house “Sokrat”).* P.111-117.
- [11] Sidensner A K 1897 *Information about the Murmansk coast, collected in the summer of 1896.* St. Petersburg Printing house of the Naval Ministry) 102 p.
- [12] Sidensner A K 1909 *Description of the Murmansk coast.* (. Petersburg Main Hydrographic Department of the Naval Ministry) 272 p.