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TRANSPORT OF VIETMINH UNITS TO THE NORTH BY POLISH SHIP "JAN KILINSKI"

Shortly after the end of the Second World War in Europe at least one Polish ship, which was under control of British Sea Transport Administration, carried military equipment from India to Sajgon. Having done it, during her return cruise, "Boryslaw" transported india - rubber to France. It took place in the fall of 1945 and it was only a solitary episode.

A long - range presence of Polish merchant flag on the seas around Vietnam was attached to the end of the Indochina War. According to the Geneva Treaty a Vietnam was shared into two parts. The Vietminh took control over the northern part and the national government kept the power on the South. The agreement said also that Communist's guerrilla units, which had been earlier active on the South, were obliged to be out and their evacuation to the North had to be organised. The preliminary estimations showed that it would be necessary to transport about 100 000 soldiers and civilians and many thousands of different equipment and stuff.

Ho Chi Minh's government was not able to organise that undertaking and finally they were forced ask the Soviet Union for help. The main problem was that the Soviet's merchant fleet, which was still rebuilding tonnage after the war losses, did not have free ships, which could take the evacuation's tasks immediately. In that situation the only solution was to charter the Polish ship "Jan Kilinski" (belonged to company called Polish Ocean Lines) which was undergoing to China ports. When the decision was made the ship was sailing near Canton. Initially the Soviet shipowner company Sovfracht chartered the ship for four months but the contract had possibilities of prolonging and that point was used. Finally "Kilinski" was in Asia nine months.

The first task of all crewmembers was preparing the cargo ship for transporting people. The works were accomplished in Canton, after an unloading the cargo. In the five holds the sailors built wooden stages with the places for sleeping and additional ladderways were also did. On the stern they got ready a provisory kitchen because the ship's galleys could prepare warm food maxims for 100 – 150 people a day. An additional taps with domestic fresh water were connected on the midship. The ship did not have large enough toilets and another sanitary devices so the wash – rooms and latrines were prepared on the deck. All

ballast tanks were washed and filled with fresh water for sanitary use. In the fourth hold they set off a special place for stowing the backlog of food – mainly about 100 tonnes of rice in sacks. Due to the fact that guerrilla units have been transported with all stores it was necessary to prepare a place for dangerous cargo, chiefly munitions. Majority of materials necessary for adaptation (wood, canvas, tin, additional tanks, etc) provided maritime administration of People Republic of China in Canton. They also provided the basic medical equipment and dressing materials.

m/s JAN KILINSKI - TECHNICAL DATA

Type: American built steam turbine cargo carrier VC S – 2 AP 3 “Victory”;
First name – “Mexico Victory”;
Length – 138,8 m;
Beam – 18,9 m;
Draught – 8,7 m;
Tonnage – 4564 NRT; 7697 BRT;
Deadweight – 10 719 t,
Machinery: steam turbine; 8500 hp;
Maximum speed – 16,5 knots,
Five holds;
Crew – 28.

Fates: built in 1944 in the USA, in 1947 bought by Polish ownership company, she was sailing between Europe and China and transported Vietminh units from the North to the South, after that she served on the Middle East line, in 1972 she was sold to Hong Kong but during her last cruise she went into Haiphong, shortly before the beginning of American mines blockade (operation “Pocket Money”), finally achieved Hong Kong in 1973 where was scrapped.

Three zones of concentration were appointed for Vietminh units on the coast of South Vietnam. All of them had their own point of embarkation

1. Zone of concentration - near the fishermen's wharf Qui Nhoan ($\phi = 13^{\circ} 46'$ N, $\lambda = 109^{\circ} 13'$ E); point of embarkation – roadstead of Qui Nhoan ($\phi = 13^{\circ} 45'$ N, $\lambda = 109^{\circ} 16,7'$ E);
2. Zone of concentration - in the mouth of Saigon River, point of embarkation - the roadstead of Cap Saint Jacques ($\phi = 10^{\circ} 19'$ N, $\lambda = 107^{\circ} 02'$ E);
3. Zone of concentration - Near Camau Point on the South from Saigon ($\phi = 10^{\circ} 00'$ N, $\lambda = 106^{\circ} 10'$ E); point of embarkation – roadstead of Camau Point ($\phi = 10^{\circ} 05'$ N, $\lambda = 106^{\circ} 12'$ E);

Polish ship started her job in the October of 1954. French Navy was responsible for the transport of Vietminh soldiers from the coast to the special floating pontoon, which was moored to a gangway of the ship. They used landing crafts and another auxiliary boats and barges. Conscripts manned the crafts and Polish sailors found out that some of them had Polish origins. They quickly became the main source of information about local situations for "Kilinski's" crew. It had enormous importance because nor the Captain neither officers nor ordinary crewmembers did not know Vietnam. For example it should be underlined that noone warned crewmember of tropical diseases. The situation was doubly difficult due to the ship did not have her own doctor, only the third officer had additional tasks as a medical officer, any vaccination were not done. Following the situation the crew was very vulnerable and majority of them was taken ill during their work in Vietnam. The infection of amoeba was the common problem.

Health and light injured soldiers climbed the gangway themselves but many of them were too seriously injured or too to achieve the deck. The crew, using ship's swinging derrick booms, prepared the special platforms for disabled, immobile soldiers. Crew was also responsible for the loading of military equipment and another stores. All works attached to embarkation and loading were dangerous due to high swell wave, lack of credible dates about cargo's weight (Vietnam's estimations were usually very inaccurate). Technical condition of loose cargo gear was also rather poor. The most untypical cargo consisted of a few elephants, which had been used by Wietminh as a mean of military transport. When the operation finished, government of North Vietnam gave away one elephant for Poland.

About 3000 – 4000 of soldiers were embarked for one cruise. The level of discipline between Vietnamese soldiers was very high. Any incidents were not noticed. During the cruise commanding and commissars summoned meetings and all typical "political activity" was conducted. Maintenance of weapon took also a lot of time. The most important problems were created by – mentioned earlier - the lack of doctor of the board. Injured and ill soldiers could still obtain only help of their hospital attendants during the cruise. Medical officer tried to help but his resource of medical knowledge was not very large. Fortunately the French medical staff from Saigon and Tourane (Da Nang) supported him.

Conditions of transport were very hard. The temperature in the holds was among 35 – 40°C and average state of sea was 5 – 8 degrees. It appeared that due to level of noise switching on electric motors of ventilation system was impossible. The "sharks" – the provisory intake ventilators made of canvas sleeves were the only solution. The hatch covers could not be open when the ship was underway due to the stipulations of safety.

The ship was accomplishing her duty in season of cyclones but the seasonal monsoon's winds also made the navigation enormously demanding and strict, especially that the system of navigational aid was rather poor. For example the only marine forecasts and weather, gale, cyclone and storm warnings were broadcast by American Naval Station in Subic Bay on Philippines. U.S. Navy changed the time and frequency of transmitting so the ship's radio operator could only sporadically – mainly by random – catch the program. Due to that situation and changeable meteorological conditions Polish Captain chose a special area of shelter. It was placed near to the Palau Gambir island ($\phi = 13^{\circ} 36' \text{ N}$, $\lambda = 109^{\circ} 21' \text{ E}$).

On the points of embarkation transport from the coast to the ship was conducted by French landing crafts and it made all work easier. On the North only one cruise finished in Haiphong, where port facilities could be used. During twenty-six cruises the disembarkation took place on the open roadsteads. Vietnamese authorities did not any bigger crafts, barges and cutters and they could provide only small fishermen's boats. In that situation the ship's survival boats became, of necessity, the main mean disembarkation.

Four points of disembarkation were appointed:

1. Anchor ground Cua Hoi in the mouth of the river ($\phi = 18^{\circ} 47' \text{ N}$, $\lambda = 105^{\circ} 48' \text{ E}$);
2. Anchorage ground Baye de' Adalong, on the East from Haiphong ($\phi = 20^{\circ} 45' \text{ N}$, $\lambda = 107^{\circ} 06' \text{ E}$);
3. Port of Haiphong (one time),
4. Anchorage ground Sam Son ($\phi = 19^{\circ} 43' \text{ N}$, $\lambda = 105^{\circ} 55' \text{ E}$).

Usually about 30 soldiers sat in the one survival boat and additionally it towed one or two fishermen's ones. It was very difficult for helmsmen to steer that "train" especially through the breaker. Fortunately any accidents did not take place and it was really a great attainment in those circumstances of full improvisation.

"Jan Kilinski" finished her service in the July 1955. Jointly she hold twenty-seven cruises and transported: 85 thousands of people (mainly soldiers), 3,5 thousands of different military equipment and 250 tones of ammunition. Except the Polish ship the Soviet one, called carried Vietminh soldiers to the North but any details of her activity are not known.

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