



# Teodors Spāde –the first admiral in the history of the Latvian state



Foto autors Ventspils hronikas arhīvs

<https://www.visitventspils.com/app/uploads/2026/09/teodors-spade-eng.wav>

Teodors Spāde was born on 7 March 1891 in Ventspils, into the family of the fisherman Juris Spāde. He studied in Ventspils and Rīga, later graduating with distinction from Riga Polytechnic Institute. Even in his youth, Teodors Spāde stood out for his wide-ranging interests – he was an active athlete and deeply involved in public life.

At the outbreak of the First World War, Teodors Spāde was conscripted into the Imperial Russian Navy. His military career progressed rapidly – he served in the Black Sea Fleet, commanded warships, and took part in naval battles against the Ottoman Empire’s navy. Following the collapse of the Russian Empire, Teodors Spāde continued his naval service with the Ukrainian Hetmanate and the Democratic Republic of Georgia, before joining the anti-Bolshevik Armed Forces of South Russia during the Civil War. He received several prestigious honours for his service, including state decorations from Russia, France, Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, Sweden, Poland, and Germany. During his service in the Latvian Armed Forces, Teodors Spāde was awarded the Order of the Three Stars, the Order of Viesturs, and the Cross of Merit of the Aizsargi (a volunteer civil guard organisation).

Having served for several years in the Imperial Russian Navy as well as other foreign fleets, Teodors Spāde assumed Latvian citizenship in 1920 and returned to his homeland alongside his wife, Nadežda. Upon settling in Ventspils, Spāde engaged in commercial activities, co-founding the Ausma shipping company and helping establish the Latvian Yacht Club. Writing under the pseudonym “Periskops”, he authored military articles, composed music, and wrote patriotic poetry.

In 1926, Teodors Spāde joined the Latvian Army. He later furthered his studies at the French Naval Academy. At the age of 40, he assumed command of the Latvian Coastal Defence Squadron. In 1938, Teodors Spāde was promoted to the rank of admiral, becoming the first Latvian to hold the position in the history of the Latvian state. Under his leadership, the Latvian Navy developed, took part in international visits, and represented Latvia abroad.

In 1940, Teodors Spāde married his second wife, Maija Pētersone. That same year, however, the Soviet occupation of Latvia completely changed his life – the admiral was discharged from service, and on 14 June 1941, he was deported to Siberia. His son Selgars was born in the same year, but Admiral Spāde would never meet him – at the end of the Second World War, his family fled to the West. While in exile, Teodors Spāde was later re-arrested and tried under Soviet penal codes, facing charges that included anti-Soviet agitation.

After serving ten years in Soviet prison camps, Teodors Spāde was released in 1953, but was forbidden from returning to Latvia. He remained in Kazakhstan, working as the chief accountant at an infectious diseases hospital in the city of Temirtau.

Teodors Spāde died in 1970 at the age of 79 and was buried in the municipal cemetery of Temirtau. In 1990, his remains were brought back to Latvia and reburied at Riga Second Forest Cemetery.

Teodors Spāde’s life story remains a symbol of loyalty to Latvia, professional excellence, and steadfast devotion to one’s principles – even in the face of life’s most painful trials. In Latvia, the legacy of Teodors Spāde has been commemorated in a number of ways. There is a Teodors Spāde Street in Riga, as well as an Admiral Spāde Street in Liepāja. One of the tugboats operating at the Port of Ventspils was also named in his honour.

Today, on the Ostas Street promenade in Ventspils, a new public art installation symbolically continues the story of Teodors Spāde’s life. Seated on one of the boats is a young boy – a visual metaphor for Teodors Spāde’s childhood, his early dreams of distant seas, and his journey from a fisherman’s son in Ventspils to Latvia’s first admiral.

📍 Katrīnas iela 16

