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SPECIAL

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NORTHERN LIGHT

PILGRIMAGE

TO

MURMANSK



JULY 1988

Welcome to our special edition of Northern Light. As mentioned in my previous editorial, this edition is devoted entirely to our recent visit to Leningrad, Moscow and Murmansk. Hopefully, it will bring back a lot of happy memories to the participants, and will make interesting reading to all members - perhaps whetting a few appetites for future tours.

First, on your behalf, I say thank you to the committee for agreeing to my suggestion that we run this issue as an extra. They did so without hesitation by saying, "Go ahead Dick, spend a few roubles - it's the members money, they are entitled to it". It is quite a few roubles too! With the preparation, printing, envelopes and postage we get very little change out of £500. Thanks also to the many volunteers who have contributed with reports and reflections of the visit. It all goes to make the largest edition of Northern Light that we have produced - 28 pages!

The tour was first announced at the Annual Dinner Dance at South Normanton last October. Little did we know what was ahead of us - it certainly was not all plain sailing. Over the next few months we had several 'off-on' situations and many minor hazards to navigate. But finally, the tour was a great success and one which we will be repeating in 1989 and 1990. Also, we did it without the additional middleman's charges, no tour operator was involved thanks to the very helpful advice from Intourist Moscow Ltd and the Soviet Embassy.

The last few days before the 'big one' had Arthur Willis and myself on the hop - we didn't know if the next pipe would be 'Hands to Stations for Leaving Harbour', 'Special Sea Dutymen Close Up' or 'Action Stations'. But, being ex-torpedomen (a TGM and LTO), everything was in the hands of the elite! and the pipe turned out to be 'Hands to Dance and Skylark'. We each made two visits to London and came away with seven carrier bags of documents, air tickets, visas, etc. etc., to be dished out at the airport, also calls on the embassy and visa department, phone calls to as far away as British Columbia and to 40 participants to inform them of a change in 'take off' time - we couldn't start the tour with a dis-satisfied crew. A happy ship makes an efficient ship and that was always important when you were on a voyage to the Kola Inlet.

As well as being a pilgrimage and holiday the tour served one other very important purpose - we all made a lot of new friendships amongst ordinary people in the Soviet Union, people just like ourselves. Most importantly, amongst the younger generation - if any of you have grandchildren who would like to write to children of their own age in Murmansk please let me know. Let's start the N.R.C. Pen Pals Club.

Regarding tours being planned in 1989 and 1990, see Stop Press on Page 28.

SATURDAY P.M. 7TH MAY.

Reported by MAURICE CROSS.

Our brave 120 took off in their Tupelov 154s from Gatwick and Heathrow bound for Leningrad and the U.S.S.R. The Heathrow departure was covered by Soviet Television and we were to meet people in Leningrad, Murmansk and Moscow who were able to tell us that they had seen us leaving. I had a slight colly-wobbles as my feet kept sliding away from me - especially at take-off. Later I was to discover it was the bloke in front of me nervously pushing along the loose carpet with his feet.

Leningrad Airport, surprisingly small for Russia's second city, was reached without incident and three coaches soon whisked us off to our hotel - the Pulkoskaya in Victory Square. The countryside appeared drab compared with home, the city trees were leafless - their Spring must be later than ours.

The Pulkoskaya's corridors were a 'jogger's trip' long, three thousand rooms and splendid rooms they were. We were not too carried away with the food, but perhaps we had not settled down to a different diet, with soup coming half way through the meal.

Our three lovely guide interpreters - Natasha their attractive leader, Nadja the beautiful, with an accented voice that would make a bishop kick a hole in a stained glass window, and sweet little Lena. They told us they would remain with us throughout the tour and that it would be their first visit to Murmansk. They were always efficient, caring, very patient and ready with a smile - even when some of us were late boarding a coach.

One of my cherished memories of Leningrad, was an incident in one of the bars at the hotel. The somewhat fierce barman, who greeted every request for drinks with a look of barely suppressed fury, refused to accept Deutchmarks from a party of German tourists. So I ostentatiously waved a Fiver over their square heads, which the barman accepted with a snarl. The Krauts meanwhile were grovelling about in their wallets for American Dollars. A moment to savour indeed - a quick burst of 'Rule Britannia' would have rounded things off nicely. What were Germans doing in Leningrad on the eve of Victory Day? Bearing in mind that their countrymen were responsible for more than a million Leningrad dead - but sensitivity was never a strong German trait.

SUNDAY 8TH MAY.

Continued by Maurice Cross

A new day dawned, a sunny day with peerless blue skies. In fact we took the sun with us all around the U.S.S.R. even to Murmansk. We set off on a tour of the city and were joined by a retired admiral of the Soviet War Veterans Committee in Leningrad. Our guides allocated us to the three coaches and I was pleased to listen to the dulcet tones of Nadja Melinkova as she showed us various parts of the city as well as giving us the names and history of the

grand buildings, canals and rivers. The city's streets were an intriguing mixture of the regally resplendent and the tatty. One minute you could be driving along the imposing Neva Embankment, or through spacious squares of magnificent czarist mansions and the next minute through semi-derelict side streets.

All the cars had a vaguely 1960's look about them, mainly Ladas, apart from the occasional massive black Zil, carrying presumably, Soviet officials. I noticed a great difference between the generations. Most Russian young women were smartly dressed, very attractive and with modern hair-do's. But the middle aged and elderly women looked as we probably visualised them - vaguely peasant-ish in the true sense of the word (a peasant is a farmer).

I didn't take much notice of the men.

To return to our tour - after driving along the beautiful Neva river, we stopped for a photo break by two 'Rostral' towers overlooking the Peter and Paul Fortress. The towers have sculptures of ships bows projecting from the sides. These were trophies representing enemy ships sunk or captured by Peter the Great's new Navy. The enemy being the Swedes - who were a very warlike nation in that century. A different story to the last war, when they flogged arms to both sides, and remained neutral.

A change of mood. Our visit to the mass graves of the Piskarjovskoye Memorial Cemetery. Six hundred thousand dead surrounded us in mass graves. The burial mounds hit you as hard as serried ranks of crosses in the Normandy war cemeteries. The Nazi ring of steel encircled the city for 2½ years. Towards the end of the siege twenty thousand people per day were dying of starvation and wounds. Nadja Melnikova told us that Hitler had planned a reception in the hotel Astoria - he even had invitation cards printed. He did not make it - but neither did 1,200,000 Leningrad soldiers and civilians.

The N.R.C. and hundreds of Russians thronged the cemetery. Some of their war veterans had about fifteen medals each side of their chests.

At a given signal the N.R.C. wreathlaying party of 120 quietly paced down the central path to the giant statue of 'Mother Russia' - her arms outstretched to receive her dead. Ken Bull and Dick Squires advanced to the flower covered plinth and laid the wreath of roses, carnations and alsroemeria, reverently to rest.

Dick then gave the Ode to the Fallen. A very moving and emotional moment. I think that the hundreds of Russians present thought so too. I would imagine that they were vastly impressed by foreigners honouring the Leningrad dead so sincerely.

"Who are you?" asked a T.V. team, who were preparing for the Victory Day celebration. Dick Squires told them. "We just had to include this cemetery in our Pilgrimage to Murmansk and we are very proud and humble to lay our wreath". And so the N.R.C. featured yet again on Soviet T.V. and Radio - it would be more when we reached the Arctic Circle - Dick assured us of that.

So, in a sombre mood we arrived at the Leningrad branch of the Soviet War Veterans Committee to be greeted on the pavement by some of the officials, one of whom had obviously met Dick before, by the way they greeted each other. It is an intriguing fact that every time we, ex NCOs and matelots, meet Russian Veterans, it is always the top brass, nothing below a Commander or a Colonel - not that we mind, we just wonder where their lower deck types are? We were ushered quickly into a Baronial mansion, up a noble staircase and into a lofty-ceilinged chamber. Russian Admiral Alexander gave a speech of welcome and referred to Victory Day and our part in the convoys, together with the Russian forces. He introduced us to a couple of Red Navy captains who had commanded destroyers during our time in the Kola Inlet.

Questiontime brought out one of the N.R.C. humourists. "Why are there no breweries in Leningrad?" - that broke the ice! and brought a quick retort from Dick Squires, "In our circuses, just like the Russian ones, we always bring on the clowns first". We exchanged plaques and speeches and talked about the make up of their veteran's organisations. All this, of course, via the nimble brain and tongue of our star performer Natasha Yurkova. What a performance - interpreting quickly back and forth, she made it look so easy. Without our three girls, we would have been voiceless and earless in the U.S.S.R.

Later in the afternoon, Nadja Melnikova lead a party of us to the Hermitage Museum and Galleries (The Winter Palace). This magnificent building could make some of our palaces look like nissen huts. Once inside we were dazzled by the opulence of the czar's reception rooms. High pillars covered with gold leaf, precious stones set in embossed walls and all lighted with dazzling chandeliers. The picture galleries casually displayed two Leonardo da Vinci paintings, a Michaelangelo sculpture, about ten Rembrants, some Rafaels and a host of others. I wondered at the 100% survival of palaces and mansions through the holocaust of the 1917 Revolution. Evidently that uprising was initiated by both workers and intellectuals. The intellectuals more or less said "for Christ's sake don't burn the bloody place down, or the world will think we are thick savages". I quote that well known historian, Kenneth Yarwood, N.R.C. In one resplendent chamber, Nadja pointed out a circular mosaic, which according to Nadja, filled a large hole. The story is this - Catherine the Great got a mood on, moved into the Winter Palace and refused all contact with her court and subjects. She had a dining table and floor arranged so that the table could be lowered down to the kitchens and then raised complete with food. This, to avoid having servants standing about near her. "Only the mice and I shall admire all this!" she said, referring to her paintings and priceless artifacts. So her subjects called the palace 'The Hermitage' because of Catherine's self imposed exile.

By the way, did you know that Tolstoy's 'War and Peace' should be 'War and People' according to Rosa, another interpreter, the original Russian word had three

meanings - but the ignorant foreigners translated it in error. Not many people know that, apart from a few million Russians!

Back to the Pulkoskaya for a free evening - we'll need it, because tomorrow it's off to Murmansk and the Victory Celebrations.

VICTORY DAY, MONDAY 9TH MAY. Reported by CHRIS.B.TYE.

At 0500 in our hotel a buzzer sounded at the bedside to herald Victory Day. No dawn was to break as it had been daylight since the previous evening. No dawn chorus was heard only the chorus of 120 of us, who had probably not been awakened so early for many years. A great day was ahead of us. Breakfast at 0630 consisted of fish, cheese, yoghurt, brown bread, etc. (no bacon, eggs or milk in sight). Then followed the coach journey to the airport where we arrived at 0730. We took off on our flight to Murmansk at 0850, soon we were to see snow on the barren wastes and hills below us. Although bright early morning sunshine, it had not been strong enough, or warm enough to melt the snow. A truly fantastic sight from the air, as this was our first view of the real Russia and this desolate panorama lasted until we landed. We then viewed the same scene from ground level at Murmansk Airport.

Dick insisted that he and Peg disembarked first and we soon knew why. He was aware of the welcome we were to have and had kept it from us so that it was not spoiled. As we walked across the tarmac the first of many greetings awaited us. School children, some of them mere tots, from local schools, each standing with a flower in their hand and white, cut-out, dove of peace badges in the other. They could not contain their excitement and enthusiasm and ran out from the terminal building steps to give us each a tulip or carnation and to pin a dove on our lapels. And, with child like laughs and smiles said, "welcome to the Soviet Union of Russia and to Murmansk". This very moving and emotive welcome touched us all, there was not a dry eye in sight, even from the toughest ex-matelots.

At this stage we were informed that it was just possible for the fittest of our members to dash away and join the Victory Parade and that a coach was waiting to speed them away for what was expected to be a four-mile march. Dick called for volunteers and he had to find more transport, as he had 56 volunteers to fill the 40 seats on the coach. Who ever heard of 'Jolly Jack' volunteering to march? Not wishing to risk my gammy leg I did not raise my hand but reported 'Excused boots, Sir'. So, the story of that march is reported later.

After booking in and having lunch at Murmansk's best hotel, the Arktika, our coach took us on a short tour of the city, our three interpreters being assisted by a team of local guides. They thanked us many, many times for bringing the glorious sunshine, especially for their big day. Murmansk has an average of 16 sunny-ish days each year and we had brought 4 of them! Our return to Murmansk

brought back nostalgic and poignant memories of the wooden city and docks devastated by bombing in 1943. We gazed in admiration on their truly fantastic rebuilding programme, although signs of the dereliction could occasionally be seen to remain. Especially noted was the building of the massive Arktika Hotel and surrounding buildings visible from our bedroom windows. Dick Squires said in October 1987 at the start of his months of planning and organisation of the tour, that we would be in Murmansk on Victory Day, and right on time and on cue, we certainly were.

At 1630 our coaches took us to the docks where we boarded the superb cruise-ship 'Vatslav Vorovsky', where we were joined by Soviet war Veterans and members of the public. We were all allocated cabins (did they expect us to be seasick?) We cast off from the jetty and headed out towards the Kola Inlet under glorious sunny skies. The ship's tannoy announced, "Please listen to announcements regarding photographing restrictions". We wondered how far we were going to sail and what we were going to see. Would we go as far as the highly militarised area around Polyarnoe? This was again another scoop for Dick, but I doubt if he knew just what had been planned for us by Intourist, the Murmansk Veterans and the Murmansk Steamship Company, the owners of 'Vatslav Vorovsky'. We all assembled in the Passenger Lounge to receive a further welcome by the veterans, this developed into a mixed discussion and Don Allen, Percy Price and George King related some of their personal memories of RQ17. Our hosts seemed to be greatly interested and impressed by this. Plaques and souvenirs were presented on behalf of North Russia Club.

The meeting closed and we all went on deck as the vessel hove to. Imagine our feelings as we gathered on the poop deck to find that we were actually out of the Inlet and in the Barents Sea, not far from the spot where H.M.S. Gossamer had been sunk. That cruel, forbidding sea paid its respects too, it was like a millpond. It did not surprise me that Dick had detailed our wreath laying party - Colin Page, a survivor of Gossamer, and ex-merchant seaman Terry Gilligan of S.S. Empire Buttress, who had spent more than a year in Murmansk docks acting as 'heavy lift' ship. The ship's ensign was lowered to half mast, as Colin and Terry gently and with feeling, laid our wreath on the water. At the same time, two Soviet veterans laid a similar wreath. The ship's siren sounded to commence two minutes silence throughout the ship. As the wreaths floated slowly away the ladies in our party cast stems of carnations on the sea. The wreaths slowly sinking below the waves to those who's memory they were intended. None of us will ever forget this ceremony.

We remained on deck for a while, during this time we continued to mingle with our hosts and we were presented with three statuettes by the Commodore of the Soviet Trawler Fleet, himself an ex-Red Navy, Kola Veteran.

As we sailed back down the Kola Inlet for the return journey, I secretly left the Dining Saloon where dinner was being served, as we were about to pass Polyarnoe. I donned

fur coat and hat as the cool of evening was approaching and stood alone on deck taking my mind back to 1943. A cold chill ran down my back and shrugging shoulders I recalled that day of so long ago, when I had said "Dear God, how much longer have I got to stay in this awful place. Please take me home, even if the ship sinks on the way". Witnessing this scene alone was a personal piece of nostalgia, of which no one was aware. Rejoining my colleagues and ladies at the dining table, I again realised that we were all below decks during the immediate passing of the new Polyarnoe Naval Base.

Following an excellent meal, many of us returned to the Lounge to be entertained with a short concert of song and dance, by a group of young Russians. At 2200 we were approaching the docks complex and 'Vatslav Vorovsky' again hove to. High on the hill overlooking the city where the huge monument 'Alyosha' stands, a huge firework display began. This was the end of a very special Victory Day, or was the display another welcome back to the 'Club of North Russia'? - the name we are affectionately referred to, from the Embassy in London to the Kola Inlet.

So ended a truly wonderful experience, it was still daylight at 0200 the following morning, when, after our last 'night caps', we realised that in 21 hours we had experienced a jet flight, a Victory Parade, a cruise down the Kola Inlet, a Dinner and Concert and a Fireworks Display. All on probably the "Longest Day of our Lives".

VICTORY DAY

Continued by Dick Squires.

Here is the story of a Victory March that started as a Falklands style 'Yomp' and finished with a police escort! Our coach did not arrive at the starting point until after the march was well on it's way. Consequently we were asked by the police to disembark and were shown a short cut to the summit, where the march was to finish. We found ourselves on a steep incline, up a slippery, craggy, mountain track. The only advantage we had over a Bluff Cove to Mount Harriet 'Yomp' was the glorious arctic sunshine. We arrived at the monument at an ideal moment with a few minutes to spare before proceedings commenced. We were quickly and courteously ushered through the gathering crowd, to a vantage point right alongside the Eternal Flame. We were amazed at the size of the gathering - estimated by the locals as 10,000 people, many of them veterans, but also serving soldiers and sailors, and mums and dads with children.

The Soviet 'Last Post' was sounded, a volley of shots were fired, the Naval Guard presented arms and the Minutes of Silence commenced. The only sound that could be heard throughout the silence, was the sombre beat of a single drummer beating off the seconds of time. Then, following the wreath laying ceremony and the placing of single blooms by individuals we prepared to depart. Who was going to lead the descent down the mountain track? Thankfully, Intourist and the Murmansk Police Department had come to our aid.

Whilst the ceremony had been taking place, our coaches had been allowed up the mountain road to a point near to the

'Alyosha' Memorial. We boarded our transport and were given a police escort, complete with blue flashing lights for the journey down to the hotel. By the time we arrived the rest of the party were settled in to their rooms.

But who was the guilty man on the coach who remarked, I hope the police aren't taking us to the Gulag - we've only been here two hours?"

TUESDAY 10TH MAY.

Reported by Don Allen.

Weather Sunny. Temperature 15°C. 59°F.

A small delegation had asked to meet the Chairman of Murmansk City Council, Mr Vladimir I Goruatshkin, as a goodwill mission between their cities.

Mr Goruatshkin arrived at the Arktika Hotel at 0850 hoping to meet all of our party prior to returning to his chambers. Having explained that this could cause delay in the Intourist schedule, he invited us back to City Hall where the Union Jack was prominently displayed with the Soviet Flag.

We were welcomed with the following speech:- "Dear Friends, we are glad to see you in Murmansk, as many British people were here during the war. Here your friends died, here our fathers died. We can understand your reasons for returning. Every year participants of the convoys come here and last year we received a delegation from the United States, and more recently one from Poland.

Everyone remembers the days of the war, it is difficult to express my feelings and to thank you all for coming. Yesterday you participated in the Victory celebrations and laid flowers, your friends and relatives will know about it. When Mr Gorbachev visited Murmansk he said that the city was the 'Kitchen of the North' and will be a nuclear free zone. Now I would like to present your association with this book which portrays the beginning of Murmansk as you knew it and records our progress to the present day."

This was duly accepted by Dick Squires on behalf of the North Russia Club and in his reply he thanked the Chairman for the gift which would become part of the club's museum and archives. He then said that he would like to introduce the colleagues he had with him.

First, John Jenkins who as Mayor of Neath Socialist Council, had pleasure in presenting a coat of arms crest on behalf of the city fathers and community. Next, Leslie Evans J.P. as ex-Mayor of Aberystwyth Council presented a plaque on behalf of the Mayor and Councillors of the city. Then followed Jack Rawlinson, to present a plaque on behalf of the Mayor and Socialist Council of Grimsby - from one great fishing port to another. Jack also presented the Chairman with a personal gift from the Mayor. Chris Tye as founder, presented a N.R.C. plaque and Don Allen handed the Chairman a copy of the Russian Convoy book. We then all received a pictorial book of Murmansk, which in it's preface depicts the four awards presented to the City by the State. First, the Red Labour Banner, for the reconstruction of the city in 1971, then the Order of the Patriotic War 1941-1945,

next is the Order of Lenin, then the highest award - Hero City of the Soviet Union.

The delegation returned to the hotel to join the main party for a coach tour of the city, stopping at the Allied War Cemetery. At the entrance gates a plinth bears the inscription - "These Monuments were erected in memory of warriors of the British Commonwealth who lost their lives bringing help to the Soviet Union during the Great Patriotic War of 1941 - 1945". George King (ex-HMS 'Halcyon') laid a wreath on the grave of Coder T.R. Evans who died of his wounds ashore, which he sustained during the sinking of HMS 'Matabele'. It was noted with a lot of satisfaction that the graves had been recently visited by members of the local community and there were none of the 29 graves without a flower.

Back in the coach we travelled up the mountain road to the 'Alyosha' Monument so that the non-marchers of yesterday could see it. More important we were able to conduct our own wreath laying ceremony at the base of the Eternal Flame. By popular consent - we called on Chris Tye to lay this wreath - a duty he performed with pride and dignity.

We next travelled back into the city centre to the Monument which depicts the hand of humanity holding the destiny of the world. The inscription reads, "In Commemoration of the common fight of countries of the Anti-Hitler Coalition against Fascism in the Second World War. Ruby Cameron and Julie Lulham laid a wreath on our behalf, a gesture which pleased everyone in our party.

After lunch we were scheduled to visit the Pioneer's Palace. This is a modern, state run school for extra curricular studies, ranging from languages, sports, art, ballet, wood-work, carving, model making etc. Some of us were introduced to six year old Nickolai who had been learning English for just two weeks. He was able to tell us his name and age and could recite the English alphabet. Others met Sergei, who at the age of 12 showed unbelievable talents at wood carving. His masterpieces included an eagle in flight and a grape-vine complete with bunches of grapes, all carved in hardwood. We visited each department in turn and the club were presented with a water colour still life and a carved wooden bowl. We found this school so interesting that many were late for the coach - until Dick got the knotted rope's end out!!

Then, on our return to the hotel, many of us were off to the duty free shop and the Beriotzka (convertable currency) shop to replenish our stock of winter comforts.

It did not pass notice that 'Up Spirits' was regularly practiced at the appointed hour. In the Soviet Union at present there is an anti drinking campaign and the locals are unable to buy intoxicating liquor on three days a week. A number of our members realised that Tuesday night was a 'drink night' and kept going till the early hours - as if they needed an excuse!!

THE ALLIED WAR GRAVES AT MURMANSK

They shall grow not old, as we who are left grow old,
Age shall not weary them, or the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun, and in the morning,
We will remember them - We will remember them.

ROLL CALL

ROYAL NAVY.

T.R. EVANS.	Coder.	Age 20	17/ 1/1942.	H.M.S. Matabele.
W. DIXON.	S.B.A.	Age 28	8/ 4/1942.	H.M.S. Eclipse.
J.F. CASE.	Petty Officer.	Age 25	25/ 6/1942.	H.M.S. Gossamer.
J.G. ROBINSON.	Stoker.	Age 23	30/ 3/1942.	H.M.S. Eclipse.

MERCHANT NAVY.

W. LAMB.	Fireman.		11/ 6/1942.	S.S. Empire Selwyn.
N.G. KING.	Asst. Steward.	Age 34	15/ 4/1942.	S.S. Empire Starlight.
E.N. WARREN.	Donkeyman.	Age 42	30/ 4/1942.	S.S. Induna.
J.B. ANDERSON.	Steward Boy.	Age 16	3/ 4/1942.	S.S. Induna.
N. MCLEOD.	Seaman.		24/12/1943.	S.S. Fort McMurray.
I.L. BURDETT.	Carpenter.	Age 20	6/ 3/1942.	S.S. Empire Kinsman.
J. BRAMWELL.	Boatswain.		17/ 4/1943.	S.S. Empire Scott.
P. MURPHY.	Radio Officer.	Age 20	24/ 3/1942.	S.S. Lancaster Castle.
S.J. RIDGEWAY.	4th. Engineer.	Age 34	24/ 3/1942.	S.S. Lancaster Castle.
AFROOZ ALI.	Fireman.	Age 29	24/ 3/1942.	S.S. Lancaster Castle.
KAREM ULLAH.	Fireman.	Age 26	24/ 3/1942.	S.S. Lancaster Castle.
ARFAN ULLAH.	Fireman.	Age 32	24/ 3/1942.	S.S. Lancaster Castle.
WASHID ULLAH.	Fireman.	Age 25	24/ 3/1942.	S.S. Lancaster Castle.
MARFAT ULLAH.	Donkeyman.	Age 28	24/ 3/1942.	S.S. Lancaster Castle.
AFSAR ALI.	Greaser.	Age 30	24/ 3/1942.	S.S. Lancaster Castle.
SARIF ULLAH.	Fireman.	Age 35	24/ 3/1942.	S.S. Lancaster Castle.

CANADA.

G. AUGER.	Fireman.	Age 35	2/ 4/1942.	S.S. Induna.
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ROYAL ARTILLERY MARITIME REGIMENT

J.J. CONNELLY.	Gunner.	Age 27	3/ 4/1942.
H. BOTTOMLEY.	Lance Crpl.	Age 29	3/ 4/1942.
D.J. CORRIGAN.	Gunner.	Age 22	4/ 4/1942.

UNITED STATES MERCHANT MARINE

M. LIEBMAN.	Messman.		11/ 4/1942.
J. O'BRIEN.	Wiper.		12/ 4/1942.
R. BENNETT	Ord. Seaman.		2/ 4/1942.

POLAND.

W. TOMALA.	A Seaman.	(no data)
MIROWSKI.	A Seaman.	(no data)
UNKNOWN.	A Seaman.	(no data)

Hear the Silence on the Crystal air -
Hanging like a Jewel rare -
Now the noise of battle's ceased -
Forget not those who gave us Peace.

Another glorious morning, blue skies, sunshine, just like a warm Spring day in England. We are all astonished by this spell of weather here in the Arctic Circle. According to local people, it is forty years since they last enjoyed such weather. All the fur hats, overcoats, long johns and pullovers were not required after all.

We started the day with a buffet breakfast at 0830. At 1000, the ladies went off to a Kindergarden, where children from the age of two up to seven are cared for whilst their mothers are at work. They were met by the head mistress, who in company with Vera, yet another fluent interpreter - guide, showed them around and introduced them to all but the very youngest of the children who displayed their talents at singing, dancing, etc. Their activities delighted the ladies, especially the local songs they sang and the traditional dances performed, including ballet, were a joy to watch. The ability and enthusiasm of the children impressed the group and there is no doubt that they all endeared themselves to the ladies.

At 1030, N.R.C. members assembled in the hotel conference room to meet the Chairman of the local branch of the 'Original International Peace Committee'. On the platform he was accompanied by Dick Squires, Chris Tye and the group interpreter Natasha. The chairman gave a brief outline of the purpose and work of the organisation i.e. Peace and Security for Europe, linking up with United Nations disarmament committees and programmes and with similar committees in the United States, arranging 'Peace Days' in different countries and aggressive advertising campaigns. Local branches have raised over the last three years more than one and a half million roubles to help fund the association, in many cases workers have donated a day's pay or given up their bonus payments when appealed to. The chairman then invited questions, many hands went up, some of the questions were very pointed, others were serious and searching. They were answered with a forthright frankness, which although not satisfying all of the members, it became clear to most of us that a tremendous effort was being made to support Mr Gorbachev's initiative and efforts towards Peace and Disarmament throughout the world. The meeting ended in generous applause and Dick presented a N.R.C. plaque to the Chairman who reciprocated by presenting a book to all present.

At 1145 the members were taken by coaches to the Regional History Museum and were joined by the ladies. Three guides under the leadership of Valentina Shavrina the museum's interpreter gave us a very interesting tour. A section of the museum is devoted to local involvement in the war between 1941-1945, this proved to be of much interest. After the visit, we posed outside for group photographs, first the members and then the ladies. A plaque was presented on behalf of the R.N.A. Aberystwyth Branch by Leslie Evans, who is a founder member of that branch.

After lunch, we all went to the Teachers Training College to meet the the International Friendship Club, 'Meridian', formed by the English Language Students at the college. we had been told that the meeting would be informal, in fact, more like an English tea party - it was! we were welcomed by a delightful lady, Julia Ostanshenko, (she had led the welcoming party when we arrived at the airport on Victory Day, but most of us did not have the pleasure of meeting her personally then). She invited the Director of the College to say a few words about the college and it's work. Bill Loades responded in Russian on our behalf. From then on the whole afternoon programme was conducted in English, at the request of the students. All aged between 16 and 21, they all spoke excellent English. One of our members was heard to say, "They speak better English than I do - and it's real English, not Americanese!". They mixed with our party by sitting, one to a table, with each four of us, discussing aspects of their education at the school and of their lives in Murmansk and surrounding areas. They served us with tea, coffee and cakes and presented us with various small badges denoting local activities. About ten of the students sang local songs and we tried to join in, as they had prepared copies of the words in English. We all reciprocated with well known, old music hall songs, with much gusto I may add, much to the delight of the students. A most happy meeting ended with an appropriate and appreciative 'Thank You' from an eloquent Dick Squires, who then presented a N.R.C. plaque and several copies of the book "Russian Convoys 1941-1945", (one copy signed by us all), to the Meridian Club. Further presentations took place including a Union Jack, a Canadian Flag on behalf of the two Canadian members present, some photographs of H.M.Ships, an album prepared by Les Harris containing photographs and a brief history of H.M.S. 'Trumpeter', an escort carrier on her convoy duties to Murmansk, the action photographs were taken in the North Atlantic, Barents Sea, Kola Inlet and finally Murmansk Docks. More plaques and pennants from branches of R.N.A. and from the Royal British Legion were presented by individuals, whilst some of our ladies could be seen moving around the students with small personal gifts. Julia and the students were deeply grateful, she said, "This meeting will always be in my memory". She and the students then crowded on the steps to give us a great send off.

Back at the hotel, Dick had arranged a late dinner at 2100, as we had been invited to attend a concert at the nearby Kirov Palace of Culture at 1715. The show was performed by the Saami Ensemble Group, made up of a few part time, semi-professionals and voluntary amateurs, and was specially staged for the North Russia Club, there were no other members of the public present. we were privileged to watch a remarkable performance, worthy of being shown at the London Palladium or at any theatre on Broadway. The costumes glittering and magnificent, the singing by the whole ensemble, as well as the soloists was quite fantastic. The leader and conductor controlled the 52 singers by just a nod of his head and a movement of his accordin. The Russian dances had to be seen to

be believed. It was a meticulous one and a half hours of continuous first class entertainment. At the final curtain we all stood and applauded for a good four to five minutes, a fitting reward for a tremendous show.

Back across the park and late dinner. Still the day was not over as Dick requested that none of us leave at the end of the meal. As coffee was being served, he took the stage to announce that we were all, ladies included, to be presented with a 'Blue Nose Certificate' with the compliments of Intourist Murmansk. The ladies too, would receive an L.P. of local Russian Folk Songs. He invited Nadja and Lena, two of our lovely interpreter-guides to make the presentations - a fitting end to another, eventful, memorable and perfect day.

THURSDAY 12TH MAY.

Reported by DICK SQUIRES

Thursday dawned and we realised that it was our last day in Murmansk, many also remembered that there was shopping to do and there was a full day's itinerary ahead. Consequently, over breakfast I received many requests to be allowed to opt out of the tours. Never the less a full coach departed for the Soviet Navy Museum, a lesser number went to the Port and Docks complex and museum and others went to the Fire Brigade H.Q. All reported interesting tours and very friendly welcomes. At the Navy museum we were welcomed by a Red Navy 'three ringer' who was in charge of the museum. He conducted us on a detailed tour ably assisted by Galina Shamanskaya of the Seamen Club who, despite her apology that she was not conversant with some nautical phrases, gave a perfect interpretation. The museum has a section devoted to RQ17. The Commander's description raised many eye-brows and it was obvious that the matter would crop up again - it did! At the end of the tour, questions were invited - there was just one - "Do you share the incorrect view, which is shared by a few people in Britain and many in U.S.A. that the Royal Navy deserted the convoy?" "Because we can assure you that the Royal Navy never has, and never will, run away from the enemy" After listening very intently to the true story he promised that on all future conducted tours, our view would always be stressed. Next followed more presentations, first a plaque was presented on behalf of the Port Sunlight Branch of the Royal British Legion by a member, Eddie Crick, then Tommy Adams presented another for Captain Walkers Old Boys and several more were presented by individuals. The tour ended very friendly, as the coach was being boarded I was invited into the curator's office to sign the visitors book over a large vodka, which wasn't bad as I had just had 'gulpers' from Gordon's bottomless hip flask. The museum staff then applauded as we drove away.

The 'opt out' trait continued after lunch, the scheduled visits included the Construction Workers Union Medical & Care Centre for the Elderly and also a school (School No.40). Both trips were much enjoyed and our members returned to the hotel full of praise for what they had seen and been told.

Next it was 'Up bag and hammock' because we were on the move again, this time to Moscow. The Chairman of the City Council sent a representative to see us off, most of the local interpreters and guides were there to say Dos Vydanya and Come

again soon. The occasion was such that a group photograph was called for and this was easily arranged. Some of the members reflected on their present mood, comparing it with their moods of the last time they left the Kola Inlet.

There was a minimum of delay at the airport and we soon commenced the flight to Moscow, which was uneventful but dry, as are most flights by Aeroflot. During the flight we were informed that as it would be very late by the time we reached our hotel, we would be taking our evening meal in the airport terminal. Disembarkation procedures were straight-forward, just identify your baggage and leave it to the porters - hopefully you would next see it at the hotel - we did!

Inside the terminal building we arrived at a shopping area and noticed several fast-food counters. There were several suggestions that we were about to sample the delights of a MacDonaldski or or Wimpyovitch snack. But no, we continued through to a restaurant where a large area, with an abundance of waitresses, was reserved for us. We enjoyed one of the best meals that we had during the whole tour.

Eventually, we were speeding along the wide Moscow streets to the Cosmos Hotel, which is situated on the opposite side of the city and 10 kilometres from the city centre. What a place! To say it was large was an understatement - 26 floors, 1767 rooms, 3534 beds, 7 bars and 5 restaurants. Many of us quickly found a bar that was still open, only to find that the price of beer matched the size of the hotel. A small can of German beer cost 1.15 roubles which worked out at £2.35 a pint. The more desperate of us still kept going until the early hours, but it didn't help the morning hangovers to find that the same beer could be purchased in the Beriotzka Shop for 50 kopeks (50p) a can.

Before reporting on the day in Moscow, let's hear what one of the ladies has to say of the last day in Murmansk. Over to Lila Willis:

On our last full day in Murmansk my mind became a little bedazzled by the number of things still to be seen in this friendly, far flung 'Glasnost' city of North Russia. The choice was, opt out or do my own thing, visit a school or visit a Medical & Care Centre. I chose the later. This turned out to be a health farm for the workers and by the end of the two hour tour all of our party was wondering how we could get booked into such a place in England without having to pay £200-£300.

The centre is run by the Trade Union and subsidised by them (we were not told to what extent). The participants pay £20 per month. Eligibility rests on your ailment i.e. arthritis, rheumatism, recovering from broken bones, asthma etc, anything that requires on-going medical treatment. The patients continue with their work and treatment is given in the evenings and weekends. The duration of stay is approx. one month. A team of qualified nurses and therapists are on hand full time. Specialist doctors are brought in for particular courses of treatment. For instance, a group of people suffering from nervous exhaustion are booked in at

the same time, or a group suffering from the aftermath of bronchitis, asthma, etc, and a specialist of that particular complaint is resident at the same time to tend their needs.

The building is modern and basically comfortable with two beds per room. The common rooms providing the needs for people away from home for six weeks, looked spacious and well designed, the restaurant-cum-concert hall had a friendly look without being 'institute' looking. There were various small lounges for chess, card games, billiards, etc.

The medical equipment was very modern and mostly herbal remedies are used. To the delight of the ladies in our party - and I am sure to the embarrassment of the male patient - we were shown into a jacuzzi bathroom where the amiable Russian was undergoing massage treatment while in the herbal bath.

Surely, the malingerers stand no chance in such a set up - they continue at their jobs and get the treatment after work. And who pays for this establishment? The trade unions, and as every worker is obliged to belong to a T.U. they are providing this health care for themselves and using it.

Our tour ended in the Cocktail Bar with a friendly barmaid. Our cocktail consisted of the juice of berries and egg white whipped to a delightful froth, a daily drink for the patients. A few of us braved the two vitamin tablets proffered. I am sure this visit gave us fresh stamina to enjoy the remainder of this brief but exciting visit to Murmansk.

Tour Operator please note: A week in such a place at the beginning of a tour to Russia would put the necessary new life into the Westerner trying to 'do' Russia in one week.

P.S. Back at the hotel I rejoined my 'hero' husband who had spent two hours flat on his back saying, that was all the therapy he needed to be given new life!

Watch it Sailor!!

FRIDAY 13th MAY. Reported by J. O. Lloyd Griffiths.

Looking out from the 21st floor window of the Cosmos Hotel on a beautiful sunny morning, presented a truly magnificent view of part of this wonderful city. In the foreground is the park which houses the U.S.S.R. Exhibition of Economic Achievement, it is dominated by a monument devoted to Soviet Space Achievement, and in the background by the Ostankino T.V. Tower with it's revolving restaurant.

After a good breakfast we were soon heading down East Prospekt on our way to the Kremlin. Along the way we passed the Riga Railway Terminus - one of nine termini in the city, the 1980 Olympics Indoor Stadium, Kirov Street which is the administrative centre and the splendid Russia Hotel, before reaching Red Square. We were all impressed with the wide streets and the architecture of the magnificent buildings.

We walked around the Square, admired and took photographs of St Basil's Cathedral with it's magnificent domes, Lenin's Mausoleum, G.U.M.s and other places of interest. Entering the Kremlin through the Troitsky Gate we saw the Congress Hall where 'Perestroika' was founded, the Council of Ministers which is the highest office of the Presidium of the U.S.S.R., and many other Government Offices. Next, Cathedral Square was of special interest, the Annunciation, Assumption and Archangel Cathedrals each providing it's own architectural splendour and beauty, so did the Bell Tower of Ivan the Great. The 40 ton Czar Cannon and the 200 ton Bell were of particular significance - the cannon was never fired and the bell never rung! We moved on to see the Bolshoi Theatre, Gorky Street, the City Hall, Pushkin Square with it's newspaper offices, Tass and many more places.

The panoramic view of Moscow from the Lenin Hills is magnificent, with the Moscow River sweeping round the Lenin Central Stadium in the foreground, whilst behind one stands Moscow University.

After lunch we visited the Museum of the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union, concentrating on the section devoted to the Second World War (or to give it it's Soviet title - 'The Great Patriotic War'). Here we were each given a variety of books on W.W.II, and on the Soviet Armed Forces, we in turn, presented them with a copy of the Russian Convoy book.

The evening was free, but Nadja had spent the day on the phone and was able to produce tickets (mainly from cancellations) for the Bolshoi Theatre, the Musical Theatre for 'Swan Lake' and for the Moscow State Circus. These were quickly snapped up and almost without exception reports were of magnificent shows. We were all tired and rather sad that a magnificent holiday was drawing to a close. Finally, I must pay tribute to Ludmilla and the other local guides who had given us unprecedented hospitality.

SATURDAY 14th MAY.

Reported by DICK SOUTHERS

Last night I felt like the Boy Seaman at 'Ganges' or 'St Vincent' who was about to go on leave - "One more lash-up, one more stow, one more cocoa and home we go." But it wasn't like that aboard the good ship 'Cosmos'. Reveille was due at 0600 but my room call came at 0540. The porter was due to collect the baggage at 0615 he arrived before the room call!! That was not all. I had an unscheduled call from a distraught member who had lost his return air tickets. I assured him that all would be alright, but I was sorely tempted to say, "I hope you can walk on water, as that's the only advice I can give you". I didn't. After all, what's a lost air ticket between friends?

By the time we reached the airport I was feeling better, Natasha had told me she loved me!! And surprise, surprise, the Duty Free Shop (Moscow's first) had opened the previous day. But how complicated it was. The goods were priced in roubles, we paid in sterling and received our change in U.S. dollars! And, we were served by Sean Casey from County Clare! The shop was being run by a subsidiary of Aer Lingus.

A happy flight back to Gatwick - Peg and I breathed sighs of relief because we had not had any major snags. More important, I was extremely proud to have had such a fine crew. You were all great ambassadors for the North Russia Club.

EXCERPTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE.

.....it was intriguing to get a little of the true background of life in Russia - instead of the usual raving and shouting of the media - on both sides. (M.C.)

.....visit to the Kola Inlet. How different it looked last week. We were very privileged to take that trip down to the Barents Sea and to remember those who were not so lucky as ourselves. (D.F.)

.....We made a lot of new friends.....It was a momentous occasion for everyone, they wore their medals with pride and rightly so. (B. & J.W.)

.....To me it was very special, having spent 12 months in North Russia there was often a tear, thinking back over forty years, just as if it was yesterday. When we returned to sea to the spot where we, the crew of the trawler 'Chiltern' carried out many sea burials, including our own C.P.O. Coxswain, it was worth every mile. (W.W.T.)

.....made an extra strong impression on me, made me think more deeply about the sacrifice and dedication of people only a few years older than myself. (Mrs A.F.)

.....There were so many highlights that it is difficult to select any one above another. The Victory Day remembrance ceremony was unforgettable, as was our voyage down the Kola Inlet. However if I was forced to pick one high spot, it would be the superb presentation of traditional Russian singing and dancing at the House of Culture. (E.H.B.)

.....It was so unique to be greeted by complete strangers in such a warm hearted and friendly manner, it was a holiday that will remain in our memories. (Mrs G.D.)

And, two messages from the young people of Murmansk:

Best Wishes
to all Veterans
of War
Happiness
Peace
Blue Sky for
Ever.
Murmansk
International
Friendship Club "Meridian"

Thank you very much
for what you have
done for our country
during the World War II.
The only thing which
we can do now is
to remember about
your heroic deeds.
To remember about you
is our duty for
the whole world.
The students of
the teacher training
college of Murmansk.

THROUGH THE EYES OF THE LADIES.

Now we read what the ladies thought of the tour, through the eyes of Bernadette Collis and Audrey Batchelor. Sorry if I have cut bits out girls - it's just a matter of cutting out some of the repetition. Blame T.R.M.C.P.E. If you wish That Ruddy Male Chauvinist Pig Editor!!

THE TOUR - DAY ONE.

Reported by BERNADETTE COLLIS.

Arrived at Heathrow to be greeted by Lila and Arthur Willis who issued travel documents. Soviet Television interviewed some of our party.

Aeroflot took off on time.....had a hot meal en route..... advanced watches three hours, arrived Leningrad at 7 pm..... then to Hotel Pulkovskaya.....booked in.....had evening meal to accompaniment of musical trio with singers and dancers..... the day closed admiring hotel.

DAY TWO.

After breakfast we set off on city tour. Nadja, our courier, pointed out the importance of Leningrad on Baltic Coast....at the Garden of Remembrance a wreath was laid and Soviet Television did more interviews.....many people around and many photographs taken. Then we drove along the banks of River Riva and saw cruiser 'Aurora', the ship that started the October Revolution.....next the Veterans Club.....after several flights of stairs we met many dignitaries in the main hall, speeches were made.....many gifts and badges exchanged.

Back to hotel for lunch.....many went to Hermitage after.... I did not go, preferring to explore the shops....all goods are inside the shops, not displayed in the windows....one way to get the people into the Stores! We then went to Lenin Square and afterwards the War Memorial which was unique and would never be found here....later, after dinner, we went off down the street where you could buy drinks from a machine....the locals were buying glasses of beer from a cylinder container. Further on flower sellers and even meat at the entrance of the Metro underground.....then back to the hotel where refreshments were available on several floors.....a very full and interesting day.

DAY THREE.

Early breakfast, then on our way to airport and Murmansk... ..flight was perfect.....one and a half hours later we arrived. We were met by Julia, Principal at the Teacher's Training College....and school-children who sang to us and presented everyone with flowers and badges of Peace. We were informed that we were in time for the Victory Day March.....Dick asked for volunteers.....it was gratifying to find so many ready to march, ladies included. Looks of astonishment on many faces when they were told that the march would be five miles, still 50% of the party went. We then went to the Arktika Hotel.

A delicious and appetising lunch, we freshened up, boarded the coach for the docks and embarked on the 'Vatslav Vorovskiy'. We were welcomed by more dignitaries who presented us with flowers and badges.....then conducted to our cabins for the trip.....to the Barents Sea.

Once we left the jetty we went on deck to view Murmansk, bringing back many memories to the men, there were not many dry eyes. Later on a meeting took place in the lounge, where war time experiences were exchanged. More presentations, more speeches by both sides ... Dick gave a very moving speech. We went back on deck, the sun was shining, a service of remembrance of all who lost their lives was very moving, wreaths were laid on the water.

The ship turned round....we went to the dining room for dinneranother satisfying meal and conversation....we returned to the deck for entering harbour....a magnificent display of fire-works welcomed us back....after saying our farewells and thank you's, we disembarked....the coaches were waiting for us.... back to the hotel after a most nostalgic experience.

DAY FOUR.

Visited the Olympic Stadium ski resort....photographs taken on the winner's rostrum with snowballs. On then to wreath laying at the cemetery and war memorials. The children of Murmansk had cleared away two feet of snow from the graves and put seed and sweets on them (a Soviet custom)....twenty three British, one Canadian and two Americans are buried there....many died from wounds received in action....it was very sad.

In the afternoon we visited the Pioneer Palace, this is a leisure centre where, after school children can follow their hobbies, keep fit, swimming, model making, woodwork, dancing, painting and many more activities. The centre is very modern has all the latest equipment. After signing the visitors book, we exchanged addresses with the children....it was a very interesting and worthwhile visit.

That evening some went for a walk, some sat and chatted, others had a sing song and dance....and so to bed.

DAY FIVE.

Today we split up....ladies visited a Kindergarden, the men to a 'Peace' meeting which was televised later in the day.

The Kindergarden is open from 7 am to 7 pm. The children are accepted from eighteen months until they are six or seven when they go on to school. The Creche is well equipped, the children have their own little beds, tooth brushes and washing facilities...plenty of toys to play with....they are all kept neat and tidy. They are taught dancing, singing and many activities to keep them busy all day. Some of the little ones have a sleep during the day...while we were there they demonstrated several dances and exercises....they were all very friendly and happy to see us....the staff made us very welcome and our couriers were very helpful with translations.

Next to the local museum....very interesting....not enough time to absorb everything....paintings....an exhibit of how the Laplanders lived and dressed....a room containing all of the minerals that are mined in the Kola Peninsula....memories of wartime.... fish of the Arctic Ocean including a Polar Shark (but not a real one).

We then met up with the men for Group photographs (courtesy of Pravda, Murmansk), next stop lunch.

In the afternoon we visited the Teacher's Training College, we were welcomed by the principal, Julia and her staff and had a very enjoyable afternoon tea and afternoon refreshments laid out, and students sitting amongst us.....discussed many topics....they were interested in collecting war souvenirs, photographs etc..... during afternoon the Students sang to us and we responded....it was interesting to know that they knew 'My Bonnie' the Scottish folk song.

The customary exchange of gifts followed and then after proposing a vote of thanks to the students, we reluctantly left at about 5 p.m. for the return to the hotel.

We were invited to see a very colourful light opera, depicting Ice and Fire, the costumes were magnificent, the singing and dancing was performed by amateurs and professionals.....we met some of the cast afterwards.....back to the hotel for dinner.....the ladies received a Russian L.P. and Blue Nose Certificate, which we are very proud of. Then followed dancing....we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves..... having twenty four hours of daylight seems to keep us going.

DAY SIX.

Our last day in Murmansk....a choice of tours.....we went to the Merchant Navy Museum, all of the records of all of the ships entering Murmansk are kept here and caused a great deal of interest....others went to the Fire Brigade or Soviet Navy Museum.

After lunch, some went to a Health Clinic....others to a school.....we went into the park and met students and exchanged points of view.

Back to the hotel...say our goodbye's and on our way to Moscow.....a very good dinner at the airport....then on to the very modern Cosmos Hotel at about midnight.

DAY SEVEN.

A city tour, taking in all of the popular tourist sights. We saw the changing of the Guards at Lenin's Mausoleum. Up at the University we saw three couples celebrating their marriage, it is their custom to have champagne and chocolates and place their bouquets on the War Memorials.

We did not take the option of Swan Lake etc....went for a ride on the Metro.....no Graffiti.....beautiful marble and chandeliers....for 5 kopeks (equiv. 5 pence), you may travel 115 stations.....we did but a few.

DAY EIGHT.

Early breakfast....off to Moscow Airport....farewell to Natasha, Nadja and Lena....they were excellent couriers.... they even opened the Duty Free Shop for us!

What a unique experience. Thank you Dick, Arthur, Chris and all your helpers, not forgetting Peggy who must have had many a sleepless night over the past year. Although tired and exhausted I would not have missed it for the world. I am sure I speak for everybody. Thank You.

And now, Audrey Batchelor's views:

Our arrival in Leningrad was heralded not to the sound of the Bosun's pipe, but to the sound of breaking bottles as Dick Squires's 'Duty Free' hit the deck! (Someone was heard to pronounce the tour well and truly launched!). We were met at the airport by Natasha, Nadja and Lena, a trio of girls I am sure we will always remember with affection.

The thing that impressed me on our visit to Leningrad was a city bedecked with red flags, bunting and huge pictures of Lenin everywhere, in readiness for the Victory Day celebrations, even the foyer of our hotel was festooned with flags draped across the ceiling with May 1988 on them.

We visited the Memorial Cemetery where Dick and Ken Bull laid a wreath in memory of those who died during the 900 day siege.....in the afternoon some of us went to the Hermitage, unfortunately, we were limited for time, so were able to see only a very small amount of the treasures that are housed there, but what we did see was worth the visit no matter how short, magnificent paintings.....beautiful sculptures and huge crystal chandeliers.....a truly impressive museum.

We all made sure before leaving Leningrad to unpack our winter woolies in readiness for the 'freezing cold' of Murmansk. I must admit the further north we flew the more bleak the landscape, with plenty of snow and ice to be seen from the aircraft windows, but on landing it was nowhere near as cold as we had been led to expect from our menfolk. There was lots of ribbing from the ladies "I thought it was supposed to be freezing here, that's what you have been telling us for the past forty odd years". To which the reply in unison from the men was "I can't understand it, we never had weather as warm as this when we were here in 1942 - 45 - did we lads?" A likely story!!

Our first day in Murmansk May 9th, Victory Day, also my husband's birthday - and what a memorable way to spend it - first go with the other men (and some ladies) to join the Russians at the most enormous Monument to the Defenders of the Arctic Regions, which overlooks the Kola Inlet - later in the day to sail in the 'Vatslav Volovskiy' up the Kola Inlet, something the men had all wanted to do but thought would not be possible, a wreath laying ceremony took place at sea in honour of the sailors who perished on Russian Convoys. Later we had dinner starting with smoked salmon and caviare and the day ended with a fireworks display.

Murmansk, a city of high rise flats with just a few old wooden houses left, a reminder of how the city looked all those years ago. This is the city that all had wanted to see again, the nostalgia started to creep in with..."I remember....." the camaraderie was there as I should imagine it was when they were in the navy many years ago. The years slipped from their shoulders, they were once more young men, they even acted like it, as when we visited 'Happy Valley' where the Northern Peoples Festival is held in the winter for skiing. There was still some snow there, so naturally snowballs were thrown at each other, then photographs of the 'winners' on the rostrum. Some of our 'young men' joined in with the local schoolboys playing football.

George King laid a wreath on one of our war graves. Our guide told us - "They are not forgotten, on Easter Day the Russian families take picnics to the gravesides and eat with those interred there, they share their food by placing bread biscuits, sweets etc. on the graves.

We also visited schools and museums and at every venue

we were warmly welcomed and given souvenirs of books, pictures (mostly painted by the children), badges etc. as a token of our friendship. We were able to respond with gifts, plaques and badges etc. Also we had a plentiful supply of 'crossed flag' lapel badges to commemorate our visit.

We were entertained to a Folk Concert at a nearby theatre.....everything about it was superb, the costumes, the singing and especially the dancing.....the highlight for me was the Cossack dancing.

As there is a 'drink problem' in Russia at the present time, no alcohol is available for sale from Sunday to Wednesday. Now I'm not saying that all our ex-matelots were gasping for a drink, but --- when on the Tuesday Dick announced that a bar would be open at 2100 hours that evening, a rousing cheer erupted from them!!

Much to our surprise we were all presented with a 'Blue Nose Certificate' on behalf of Intourist. I am sure that we will always treasure it.

We were all a little sad at leaving Murmansk but looking forward to seeing Moscow. On our arrival there it was dark!! what a shock - especially after having perpetual daylight for the last few nights. Our tour of the city next day included Red Square, Lenin's Tomb and the Changing of the Guard, the beautiful, colourful building of St Basil' Cathedral and the eye catching gold cupolas of the other cathedrals in the Kremlin. As our guide on the coach told us, "everything in Moscow is bolshoi (big) - the buildings, the hotels, the statues". It is a very beautiful city.

In the evening we went on the Metro - trust us to chose the rush-hour, we put our five kopeks into the machine and went along with the crowd, jumped (or was I pushed?) on to the escalator, which is twice as long and much faster than those at Waterloo Station, it also seemed much steeper, down to the station, and what a station, no graffiti or litter but beautifully decorated with grey and white marble and lit with chandeliers - a sight for sore eyes.

Sadly our visit to Russia is over, but I am sure we will all be reminiscing about it for a long time to come. I have some very happy memories of our holiday and of the people I met, both English and Russian. We were extremely lucky in having warm and sunny weather the entire time we were there - whilst in Murmansk we had the hottest day for 15 years.

As the sayings go, "THE SUN SHINES ON THE RIGHTEOUS" or "THE DEVIL LOOKS AFTER HIS OWN".

D O S V Y D A N Y A .

The draft copy of Northern Light was due to be sent to the printer for estimate within twenty four hours. I then received a nine page contribution from Alf Lewis which contained many new views and experiences of the tour that I have had to do something about it. I have decided to delay despatch by a couple of days, dispense with two pages of photographs and print excerpts of the contribution. Should anyone require a copy of the full report, please send me a large stamped addressed envelope. (Editor)

THE ALF LEWIS PAGES

AT HEATHROW AND AIRBORNE:This isn't your ordinary package deal to the Costa Del Sol, Teneriffe,.....this is the BIG ONE. Half an hour before booking in time Aeroflot are besieged by the North Russia Club.....old comrades meet, wives are introduced. As smoothly run as one of Chris Tye's Sod's Operas, we are soon in the duty free lounge - the Pusser's Rum disappears from the shelves. We are airborne, no sooner has 'Unfasten Seatbelts' been piped, than a few not-now-so-Able-Bodied-Seamen are pacing the gangway dishing out tots and it's 'Up Spirits' over the North Sea.

AT LENINGRAD'S PULKOVSKAYA HOTEL: The hotel room is comfortable and has bathroom and toilet en-suite. Strangely, tea towels serve as hand towels whilst the bath towel measures 3ft by 1ft. There are plugs in the bath and hand basin despite pre-trip rumours to the contrary.

IN THE RESTAURANT: There is a drink problem in the USSR which has resulted in the Government banning the sale of liquor in all but hotels. To combat this.....hard core drinkers set up illicit stills. Not to be outdone the Government rations sugar - it's a never-ending battle! To get hold of hard currency - in our case Sterling - we are approached by a waiter who offers two roubles to the pound. The official exchange rate is one for one...we readily part with our fivers, only to find we have difficulty in spending roubles (and by shopping around you could get five for one). One of the hotel bars accepted roubles - although a vodka and tonic cost £3.20 we console ourselves that we are paying £1.60 - and a Russian measure is 50grams whilst ours is only 25grams.

AT PISKARIOVSKOYE CEMETARY:a living tribute to those ordinary - nay - extraordinary people, who laid down their lives defending this city.....as we march towards the Eternal Flame inquisitive eyes stare at us. "Who are these old men, wearing medals? Why do they wear a Russian decoration?" we would like to tell them we wear it as proudly as their compatriots.....the language barrier prevents all but a smile. After all, we only convoyed the ships to their beloved country, and believe me, beloved is a mild adjective. It was they, their parents and grandparents who suffered.....Our simple wreath-laying followed by Dick reciting "At the going down of the sun... ..we will remember them". And who could blame him for the emotional quaver in his voice. After this most moving ceremony I found myself standing next to Alexei Alexander, a retired Rear Admiral, his face gazing impassively at a plot with a simple headstone, an oak leaf engraved on the granite face with the date 1941. Somewhere in that plot, he told me, lay his wife and daughter. It was I, not he, who shed tears.

ENROUTE TO MURMANSK:.....I opt for a back seat....I want to enjoy a smoke with my drink....Bill Loades thinks likewise.....we sit on opposite sides of the gangway. Deciding whether to start with brandy or whiskey, Bill looks up and remarks on the capabilities of a woman making her way down the gangway. As I look at her I'm struck by the way her eyes are fixed in my direction. They have an almost hypnotic effect on me - By God she's tall - and built to match her height. She mutters something to me and squeezes into the empty seat next to mine. I look at Bill, our eyebrows lift in unison. We decide on a Scotch, as I sit back I am aware that my statuesque companion is focusing those fascinating eyes on me. Smiling I lift my plastic cup, utter the word 'whisky' and take a sip. She returns my smile, I offer the cup, she accepts and swallows the remaining spirit. I look at Bill who is as spellbound as I. He replenishes my cup, I offer it to the Amazon, she declines and in broken English asks, "What is your name?" The ice is broken and during the next ninety minutes we converse in broken English and scribbled hieroglyphics. Her name is Elizabeth; she is a doctor; 31 years of age; is in love with a man in Murmansk who is impervious to her feelings; is returning from a three-week holiday in Cuba and yes, she will have one more drop of "weeskee" but only a "leettle one" as daddy will be at the airport. As we land she informs me that she will call to see me at the hotel tomorrow night and take me to see her flat. My mind plays havoc with me! Is she KGB? Will the flat be bugged? Will there be a hidden video?as we land I am aware of her height. She told me she was 187 centimetres tall, favouring her mother who is 192 at the time I couldn't convert metric to feet and inches. We shook hands and said goodbye.

AT MURMANSK AIRPORT:the schoolchildren race across the tarmac to greet their British visitors. Their paper doves are pinned on to us and a tulip solemnly presented to each of us. Their warmth and affection touches every one of us and handkerchiefs are hurriedly searched for.....the children are still waving as we disappear.... They are no different to our own grandchildren - innocent to the ravages of war and destruction - lovable little lambs whom we hope will never have to experience what we and their grandparents went through. Most of us express the thought that this was the most moving moment of the whole pilgrimage. I would not deny them that memory.

BOARDING THE COACH: I hear my name being called - I turn to see Elizabeth walking towards me with a male companion. It is her father, she introduces us, fixes me with those hypnotic eyes and says "Goodbye, until tomorrow".

ABOARD 'VASILY VOROVSKOY': Our thoughts go back to those dark days when the enemy was just a few miles from Murmansk, where our convoys delivered the planes and tanks, the raw materialsin an attempt to halt the unrelenting enemy....One Russian veteran I spoke to told me of his young brother who at 13 years started to fight alongside his comrades. The lad, for that is what he was, was killed at the tender age of 15. I was shown the boy's photograph taken in his uniform shortly before his death. The photo - now showing the ravages of time - was obviously the veteran's most treasured possession.

.....two wreaths were lowered into the Barents sea, one British, one Russian. Then each member let drop a carnation over the side....the thin floral line receded aftwe stood and watched in silence and wondered whether the spirits of those brave men now lying many fathoms down..felt quietly content that their comrades had travelled from their homeland to pay homage.....After dinner we were entertained by three lads and three lasses who would have earned top marks in any New Faces competition.

AT THE CEMETARY: By the roadside lies a small cemetery.... each grave is tenderly cared for by the children of Murmansk - they are immaculate. They could not have found a more serene resting place or had their graves more tenderly cared for - they will not be forgotten, not while Murmansk stands.

IN THE ARKTIKA HOTEL: There is a 'Dragon Lady' on each floor, 24 hours a day, who runs a laundry, clothes repair and ironing service besides making a passable cup of "chi" (tea).our long johns and woolies remain in the cases, today it is 68° F.

IN MOSCOW: At the Cosmos Hotel....Luckily I am on the 11th (of 26) floor, the view from the window is reminiscent of London, a vast sprawling conglomeration of concrete..... Although one of the world's largest cities (8.4 million) in adding new structures the Muscovites have carefully preserved the monuments of the past. More than 780 buildings are under state protection.

ON THE METRO: It was the first time a woman had given me her seat. This dear old soul, who must have been in her late seventies, tugged at my coat tails, stood up and offered me her seat. I smiled and politely refused. But no, she almost pushed me into her seat. I looked round embarrassedly at a sea of faces who nodded their approval. I was bemused. On my return to the hotel I recounted the experience to the courier, who informed me that it was an offence not to give up one's seat to an ex-serviceman....What a difference to dear old England where a veteran is more likely to be given a mugging than offered a seat.

COMING HOME: A knock on the door at 7 am. A porter beckons that he has come to collect our luggage; he is most belligerent when I attempt to carry the cases to him. This is the Russian character - they are proud of the jobs they do, even the most menial of tasks. Our courier says goodbye to us, "I love you, my mother and father love you, when I marry and have children they will grow up loving you. You are the happiest people I have ever known. Goodbye and Good Luck to you all. And do, please, come back to us". We applauded her sincerity and promise, God willing, that we will be back.

SUMMARY: Those young 'sprogs' from the '39 - '45 war, though not now as sprightly, are still full of the spirit that carried us through those grim years. Still proud of the ships they served on.....they all did a fine job and the past week has been a time to relive those past glories, renew old friendships and pay homage to those we left behind. Especially those who lay at rest in that tiny cemetery on the outskirts of Murmansk. "AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN WE WILL REMEMBER THEM."

TITBITS

A HOLE IN THE FLOOR.

From information received I have to report the 'Hole in the Floor' incident at Murmansk Airport on Thursday 12th May 1988.

Shipmate Sheik Abdul Attati, having experienced some difficulty in performing normal ablutions at the prescribed time, felt an urgent need as we approached the airport for our flight to Moscow.

Abdul, in great haste sped to the airport toilet - now desperate, alas. All he could see was a hole in the floor with some water (?) in it - truly a water closet. Aghast, he contemplated what he should do - his western dress did not lend itself to this mod-con. Should he stand, sit or squat? Events overcame time, so poor Abdul adopted the low squat, only to overbalance, landing on his bum in the bog hole. Yes, you've guessed it - no paper.

So Abdul, with pants at the dip, poked his head around the door, and frantically signalled for help. A rescue party armed with face cloths and paper soon detached from the main party, and were soon steaming to his aid.

Being the calibre of man he is, Abdul soon had things tidied up, ship-shape and Bristol fashion, and was seen rejoining the main party with a smile on his face.

MRS WHO (?????).

Dick was on stage supervising the presentation of 'Blue Nose' certificates. Peggy came up to collect their joint certificate and returned to her seat. She was soon back on her feet demanding an explanation - the certificate was made out to 'R. D. Squires and Mrs Smithson --- he is still searching for an excuse!

APPREHENSION.

Who were the most apprehensive members at Gatwick on Saturday 7th May? Chris Tye, and Bill and Ruby Cameron (from Canada). Why? They were actually in the queue at Aeroflot Check In before they received their visas. But all was well, Intourist and the embassy said they would be there - they were, but only just!!

A MEDALLION FROM POLAND.

The Chairman of Murmansk City Council presented the club with a specially struck medal on behalf of the Polish Convoy Veteran's Group who had recently visited Murmansk. The ships named on the medal all served on the Kola Run, many of you will remember some of them - the S.S. 'Tobruk', and the destroyers O.R.P. 'Orkan', O.R.P. 'Piorun' and O.R.P. 'Garland'. We are now trying to make contact with the Group who are based in Gdansk.

WHICH WAS THE REAL CURE?

Ron Bansall Allen (ex Cassandra and Bellona) was unfortunately taken to hospital during our stay in Murmansk. The problem seemed to be inflamed joints and he was finally discharged the proud possessor of a pair of crutches, shortly before our flight to Moscow.

During our full day in Moscow, the tour coach in which he, Arthur Willis and I (all ex-Bellona) were travelling after visiting the Kremlin, broke down, which meant that we were unable to join the Museum trip organised for the afternoon.

What more natural then to take part in a "mini-Bellona reunion"? This we did in the hotel bar. The festivities over we left the bar. As Arthur and I walked through the door Ron hurried to join us - without his crutches. I pointed the absence of them out to him and he doubled back for them! His speed was somewhat curtailed following their retrieval:

(Chas. S. Reeve.)

THE RUSSIAN CONVOYS 1941-1945 by Paul Kemp.

Many tour members expressed an interest in the book that was presented to Soviet Veterans and Students. The 64 pages containing 125 convoy pictures is available from stockists at £4.95 plus postage and packing. However, we have arranged that the book can be purchased from Dick Squires at £4.50 inclusive of postage etc. Please contact him at once, together with your remittance as soon as possible. Allow 21 days from date of order.

STOP PRESS

A SIMILAR TOUR HAS BEEN BOOKED FOR 1989. INFOURIST'S MOSCOW OFFICE IS PREPARING A QUOTATION BASED ON OUR SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS. THE TOUR WILL BE TO THE SAME THREE CITIES AND OF LONGER DURATION - THIS WILL GIVE ADDITIONAL DAYS IN MOSCOW AND LENINGRAD, WITH MORE SIGHT-SEEING TOURS, SOCIAL EVENTS AND FREE TIME. THE DATES :- 4TH MAY TO 13TH MAY 1989.

APPLY TO R.D. SQUIRES, 28 WESTBROOK ROAD, GATEacre,
LIVERPOOL L25 2PX (Tel: 051 427 9567) FOR BOOKING
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