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Воспоминания об Арктических конвоях

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В книге собраны удивительные воспоминания и рассказы о героических подвигах моряков-ветеранов военно-морского и торгового флота Великобритании, Канады и США, принимавших участие в Арктических конвоях по доставке военных и продовольственных грузов союзных войск по ленд-лизу в северные порты России во время Великой Отечественной войны 1941–1945 гг. Воспоминания, интервью, письма и дневники ветеранов и их родственников значительно дополняют историческую картину военных событий в Арктике и на Русском Севере. Рассказы иностранных моряков воссоздают атмосферу мужественной борьбы и самоотверженного труда всех, кто боролся за победу над фашистской Германией.

Книга адресована всем, кто интересуется историей Русского Севера во время Второй мировой войны.

The Book is a truly remarkable collection of reminiscences and memoirs of heroic endeavours manifested by the British, Canadian and USA war time navy and mercantile veterans – participants of the Russian Convoy mission delivering military and food supplies to the Russian Northern ports during World War II of 1941–1945. The detailed reminiscences, interviews, letters and diaries of the veterans and their relatives considerably contribute to the historical research of the war in the Arctic and the Russian north. The tales of foreign sailors recreate the atmosphere of stoicism and dedication of all those who fought for the victory over Nazi Germany.

The book is addressed to anyone interested in the history of the Russian North at the time of World War II.

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Introduction: The Author to the Reader

I first met the veterans of the allied forces in 1991 when they visited Arkhangelsk as honoured guests to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the first Arctic convoy codenamed Dervish, which came to our city on August 31, 1941. That was the most memorable event for the citizens of Arkhangelsk! It was a real reunion of the Russian seamen with the mariners of the allied forces. We were delighted to see those happy faces of the mature veterans from different countries who had been eager to meet each other ever since the end of the war. Fortunately, in the early 90s the “cold war” was over and the “iron curtain” fell. So, many people from the West could resume their old relationships and visit the Northern cities to remember and pay homage to their fallen comrades buried in the cemeteries in Murmansk and Arkhangelsk. Since that time the Dervish celebrations have been held in Arkhangelsk every 10 years – in 2001* and 2011.



Dervish celebration in Arkhangelsk, 1991. *Photo of Sergey Zaozersky*

*See the related story and the internet links on Dervish 2001 commemoration in Archangel: Brown, Edmund. Worst Journey in the World // The Moscow Times. Sept. 14 2001. URL: <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/weekend/article/worst-journey-in-the-world/366850.html>.

By that time I had become the director of the British Centre at our Northern Arctic Federal University and to my great delight I was actively involved in the programme of meeting the veterans. Thus in 2010 we were happy to accept eighteen guests from UK and USA when they arrived in Arkhangelsk on occasion of the 65th anniversary of the V-Day in Russia. Since that time we have become great friends. So due to my personal contacts with the veterans I was lucky to have collected and recorded many veterans' stories and was encouraged by my new English friends to start writing a new book about the veterans of the Allied forces during World War II, namely "A Flashback to the Arctic Convoys".

From the very beginning I was determined to write this book as a tribute both to the men who died and to the survivors of the Arctic Convoys. We must admit the Arctic Convoy mission has not yet become as well-known as other campaigns during the war. So this is an effort on my part to help some of the British, American and Canadian veterans to gain more recognition and make their heroic endeavours known to the rest of the world.

I take my hat off to **Gordon Long, MBE (1925–2014)**, **Frank Bond**, **Ernest Davies**, **Fred Udell**, **David Cottrell**, **Donald Wampler**, **Kenneth Reath**, **David Craig**, **Stanley Ballard**, **James Wells**, **Arthur Gardner**, **James Pitts**, **Jock Dempster (1928–2013)**, **Charles Downs**, **Austin Burne**, **Geoffrey Mortimer**, **Edward Bagley (1922–2013)** and **Alex Blue (1925–2013)**, the common seamen and airmen from the allied forces whose stoicism and significant contribution in the defeat of the Germans during World War II cannot be overestimated. I am very grateful to them for their readiness to be interviewed by me share their wartime stories with me. In my country, here in Russia, we look upon the Arctic convoy veterans as real heroes. Over the four military years forty arctic convoys carried four million tons of military aid to Soviet Russia. The cargoes of weapons delivered by the convoys were crucial for Russian survival and the defeat of Nazi Germany.

The Arctic Convoy mission is a proof of how unity between different nations brought about a successful end to a terrible war. For the men who sailed the ships and defended them, the convoys demanded endurance beyond the call of duty. Each seaman knew that at any moment his ship could be struck by a torpedo. And they were just ordinary boys and young men. Most of them when they joined the convoys in the war were incredibly young, from 13 to 15 years old. In fact they were teenagers and were used on ships for small jobs like working in the galley, working in the mess, working on deck, serving on the ships as cabin cadets or standing on the bridge as a look out, working as signalmen. I asked **Frank Bond** what his job on board the ship was. This is what he said to me with his usual sense of humour: "I had two

jobs depending on the state of emergency on the ship. Now if we were just cruising, my job was on the bridge as a lookout with the pair of binoculars, big coat and our crew chief used to say: “We’ve got you young kids up here, because you’ve got very good eye sight”. “What are we looking for?” And he said: “Literally you are looking for broomsticks, you know, on handles of brooms”. “Broomsticks?” You can imagine the confusion of those boys when periscopes became broomsticks.

Were these young boys scared of the war at sea? That was the most frequent question I asked the veterans. They would all tell me that there was always apprehension. But as **Ernest Kennedy**, a veteran from the Russian convoy club in London commented: “We were to go to Russia. I didn’t think I was going to like this trip from what I heard through the “grapevine”. Watching what was going on I was scared.”

The book “A Flashback to the Arctic Convoys” is a unique collection of the wartime reminiscences of the veterans themselves and their relatives told the author of this book. Whilst listening to their stories and then reading them in the book you suddenly realise what an awful burden of responsibility was laid upon those young boys.

The route through the Arctic waters was especially terrifying, because the convoys had suffered continual bombing. “*The Germans tried in the Arctic all sorts of tricks to sink us. This was absolute hell!*”, recalls 87-year-old **David Cottrell** from Bristol; The Nazis had many aerodromes in Norway which they used to send their aircraft out to attack the convoys. This is how **Donald Wampler**, an American veteran, recollects the Russian convoy mission. “German spotter planes circled the Convoys 24 hours a day. When they hit the ship carrying ammunition, the ship blew up with no hope of survivors... PQ 16 had started with 35 ships and only 23 reached Russia”. U-boats relentlessly attacked the Arctic convoys. Horror envelopes us when we read the recollections of **Stanley Ballard** and **Ernest Davies** who served on the ship HMS Cotton and they witnessed how the German U-boat attacked HMS Goodall when 150 seamen died in that battle.

In addition to this we know there was natural disaster – bad weather conditions. Impassable ice and severe raging storms were a constant threat for the Arctic convoys on their way to Russia. “It was a terrible journey up there, but the weather was the worst part of most journeys. Waves in the Barents Sea are unbelievable. The waves were as big as a block of flats coming at you”, recollects **Arthur Gardner**. “As we were coming back from Russia we hit a storm like you wouldn’t believe. We were travelling about 30 degrees either side. On that trip the force of the water smashed flat the front of our funnel. We arrived in port looking a mess”. **James Pitts**, a te-

legraphist-airgunner, recalls how difficult it was for them taking off and landing on the carrier in stormy weather because the waves could be 20 meters high and the ship would be moving around as they tried to get back onto the deck: "I survived three crashes, including one on my 19th birthday when the plane overshot the landing deck and ended up hanging upside down from the edge of the ship, but I was luckier than some of my comrades. If you crashed and went into the sea, you would freeze to death in a very short time". They all had faced the trying ordeal in bitter cold of the Arctic Sea. "The cold was very cold. That was quite cold", recalls David Craig." And when you were up on the bridge the wind would be coming against you, the side of your face used to get ice. The snow could freeze on the side of your face".

I could not have undertaken this work without the ready cooperation of the seamen personally who agreed to share with me their reminiscences of the most difficult time in their lives. It was a real surprise for me to get a book "His life" as a present from the author himself – Arthur Gardner. The veterans gave me every encouragement to proceed with my book. In this book it becomes evident the veterans sincerely believe that the later generations cannot imagine what they went through. To my great surprise, some of the veterans like **Kenneth Reath, MBE** and **Stanley Ballard** have revealed their philosophic attitude to the war times in writing poetry. Some of my students and me were willing to be involved in the translation of their poems: "Brothers" and "The Destroyer".

We were delighted to meet the British and American veterans from the Royal and Merchant Navy at our Northern Arctic Federal University during the 65th anniversary of a V-Day in Russia. All of us were impressed by the veterans' amazing energy and optimism. It was a real pleasure for our students and my university colleagues to talk to them and listen to their recollections of tragic incidents from the battle scenes. They set for us a good example of stoicism and optimism. To our great surprise the veterans always demonstrate a high sense of humour in their stories and never forget to thank the citizens of Arkhangelsk for the wonderful hospitality shown to them by the Russians. Even at war time they were happy to meet the Russians and remember them with much warmth and gratitude:

"We consider it a great honour to be invited to your University. When I left Russia at the age of 17 after my last convoy, I never dreamed that at the age of 85 I would still be coming back here, We get such a wonderful welcome here. We have so many friends in Russia" (**Gordon Long**, MBE).

“During our runs up there, America gave the Russians some warships, so at one time we had to take some Russian sailors to England to pick a ship up. We had about four in each mess. Although we didn’t know their language, we could make ourselves understood to each other and we used to have a laugh with them all day. We were sorry to see them leave” (*Arthur Gardner*).

“The Russians saved my life. They gave me my life back. I would have been dead at 18–20 years old. I would have been gone 70 years ago” (*Austin Burne*).

“Russia has given us medals which I appreciate very much” (*Ernest Davies*, Branch Chairman, The Russian Convoy Club in London).

“Do not fraternise with the Russians too much. And don’t particularly mix with the military”, our captain used to tell us while in Russia. “We still made friends with the Russians. We made friends with the military and the local people. Yes, we were bombed every night. Yes, we had hardships every day. But there was still friendship. We regularly went to their homes. Old women (Russian Babushkas) would treat me as their son” (*Jock Dempster*).

In conclusion, I would like to add that children and grandchildren of many of the veterans both in Russia and in the UK have become interested in what the veterans did during this Russian convoy mission. Many students of our university felt very grateful to be able to see and talk to the veterans who had visited Arkhangelsk on a V-Day in 2010 and the Day of Remembrance in November 2012 and 2013. Our students would listen and discuss all those moving war time stories most appreciatively. This book with its many reminiscences of the allied seamen and their relatives will allow the memories of those who served during World War II to be passed down to future generations.

*Dr. Valentina Golysheva, British Centre Director,
Northern (Arctic) Federal University,
Arkhangelsk, April, 2014*