



Russian Convoy Club of New Zealand

Newsletter

August/September 2021

Dear shipmates, families and friends

Veteran cruiser reopens to public after major revamp



The passages, mess decks, turrets and myriad compartments of HMS Belfast are again echoing with voices as the legendary warship has reopened to the public.

The veteran cruiser – the last reminder of an era when guns were the Royal Navy’s principal weapon – has completed a 15-month refit on the Thames. The ship – which celebrates 50 years as a floating museum in London on Trafalgar Day – hasn’t welcomed a single tourist aboard since March last year and the first days of the first lockdown.

Curators, historians and conservation experts have used the enforced closure to bring forward their ten-year plan to overhaul the cruiser and significantly improve the visitor experience. They have drawn on the extensive collection of first-hand accounts, private papers, documents and diaries held by the Imperial War Museum – which looks after the warship on behalf of the nation – to begin re-telling the Belfast story.

So far they’ve revamped 2 Deck – the main deck open to visitors – with the focus on the ship’s role after World War 2 and her time in Korea. These are stories less well-known than Belfast’s actions on the convoys to the Soviet Union or off Normandy.

And in due course the curatorial team intend to re-tell those famous episodes anew as part of the ongoing overhaul of the ship. But for now, curator Rob Rundle is delighted to celebrate Belfast’s role off Korea at the beginning of the 1950s.

“We are blessed with a wealth of rich personal stories, memoirs and the like. The widow of Surgeon Lieutenant Tony Rowan left us his papers and his recollections of Korea were so vivid we decided to tell the story of that war through the sick bay.”

As a junior doctor, Rowan dealt with all manner of ailments – from venereal disease to the casualties of war, all thoroughly documented, at times in bleak terms. His story is brought to life through film, a recreation of his office and soundscapes – probably the first thing visitors will notice stepping aboard.

Peppered around the ship are 3D speakers which bring compartments to life with chatter, the noise of machines at work, the chippies toiling in the workshop, the cooks (as they were then) in the expansive galley. It’s effective, authentic and definitely not gimmicky.

For younger visitors various interactive displays have been installed – especially in the galley – to give them a flavour of life aboard and what it took to run a major warship (5,600 sausages a week, inter alia, apparently.)

Serving sailors who have never visited Belfast will find her closer to today’s warships than they might imagine – piping, wiring, ducts and vents are everywhere, there’s little space in the mess decks, and meals are still served from a food counter (the offerings in 2021 are a little healthier than the meat and two veg on offer to the cruiser’s crew).

“I hope that we have got the balance and tone right – between the serious side of HMS Belfast, and the fun, the life aboard for the men.

“We think of Belfast as a ‘living machine’. Looking after her is a formidable challenge – there is a huge amount of maintenance required. But it is also hugely rewarding.”

Obituaries

We are saddened to advise the passing of three of our members:

- Christine Christensen, wife of our late member Colin (HMS Zealous); and
- Donald Matheson (HMS Black Prince) who was a member for only a few weeks.
- Dorothy (Mae) Carson, wife of Bill (HMS Trinidad), who regularly attended our events until ill health halted her visits.

Our deepest condolences go to all families.

Commemoration in Liverpool



Eighty years to the day that sailors left Liverpool on ‘the worst journey in the world’, wartime Allies paid tribute to the men of the Arctic convoys. Representatives from the United Kingdom, United States, Canada and Russia gathered in St Nicholas’ Parish Church to remember nearly 3,000 sailors who sacrificed their lives to deliver vital aid to the Soviet Union between 1941 and 1945.

They ran the gauntlet of Nazi sea and air power and faced horrendous weather conditions – snow, ice, sub-zero temperatures, weeks of perpetual darkness in winter and little hope of rescue if they went in the water. The mission – which began on 12 August 1941 with the first convoy, Operation Dervish, sailing from the

Mersey – was dubbed ‘the worst journey in the world’ by Winston Churchill.

The Royal Navy’s senior engineer Rear Admiral Jim Higham and Regional Commander for Northern England and the Isle of Man Commodore Phil Waterhouse led tributes on behalf of the Senior Service alongside personnel from HMS Eaglet, Liverpool’s Reservist unit.

They were joined by Defence Minister Baroness Goldie, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Minister Wendy Morton, military representatives from Russia, the USA and Canada and Liverpool’s Lord Mayor among other dignitaries.

“Those who sailed on the convoy displayed exceptional bravery in some of the most challenging circumstances in World War 2,” said Mrs Morton.

“Today, on the 80th anniversary of the first convoy’s departure from Liverpool, we honour all those who served and pay tribute to their heroism and sacrifice. They played a major role in the shared history between the UK and Russia – and the ultimate Allied victory.”

After the service wreaths were laid at the Arctic Convoys Memorial in the church grounds before participants moved to the nearby Western Approaches Museum, from where the battle against the U-boat was directed for most of World War 2.

Commemorations concluded at Liverpool’s town hall with a reception for 150 people, with two Arctic veterans the guests of honour.

The heavily-guarded Dervish convoy reached northern Russia without incident – it caught the Germans by surprise and they made no efforts to attack it. But they did attack many of the subsequent 77 convoys which came within range of U-boats and German bombers based in occupied Norway.

Sixteen Royal Navy warships were lost and 1,944 Senior Service personnel were killed, while 85 of the 1,400 merchant ships which took part in the Arctic runs were sunk, a loss rate 17 times higher than in the Atlantic campaign. More than 800 merchant sailors died.

Their sacrifice was not in vain. Over four years, they delivered four million tonnes of supplies to the Soviet war effort – about one quarter of the total aid they provided to the USSR between 1941 and 1945. The 7,000 aircraft and 5,000 tanks, plus trucks, cars, fuel, medicines, metals and other raw materials helped the Soviets to defeat the Germans on the Eastern Front.

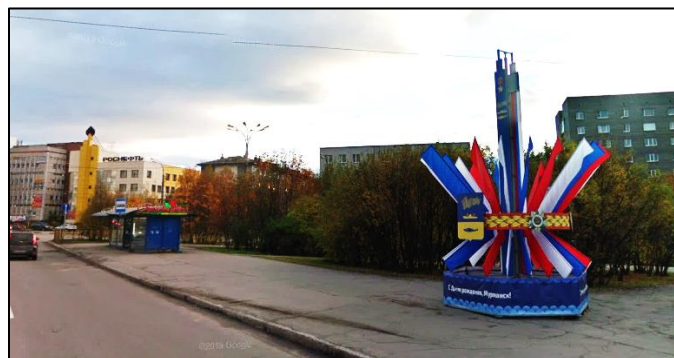
👁️ In a war of national survival, the operational and logistical challenges for the Arctic Convoys were tremendous and we should all admire the courage of both the Merchant Fleet and the Armed Forces as they faced the harshest conditions imaginable. 🧡

Lieutenant Colonel Guy Balmer RM

And our thoughts are with ...

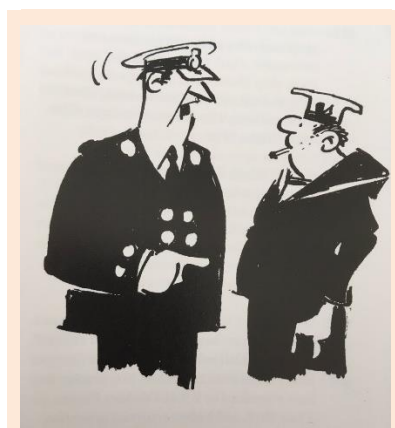
Our thoughts go to Trevor and the family of our long-time member Sheila Williams, wife of Bill (HMS Loch Inch), who has been in ill health for some time.

Arctic Convoy billboard spotted on Google Maps



Take a “drive” around Murmansk with Google Maps’ street view and you may be surprised at the sights you see!

Images (dated September 2016) show a billboard and commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the Dervish Convoy – the billboard located along the Prospekt Kol’skiy (Kola Avenue) thoroughfare and the commemoration near the corner of Ulitsa Papanina and Ulitsa Kapitana Burkova (Papanina and Captain Burkova Streets).



‘The Captain’s approved your request to buy yourself out, in fact, he’ll even provide the money!’



Thursday 26 Aug 2021
RCCNZ meeting
Lower Hutt RSA
(COVID regulations permitting)

Thursday 25 Nov 2021
To be advised

Further details will be advised as they come to hand

Up Spirits!



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