



THE CAMBRIDGE
RUSSIAN-SPEAKING SOCIETY
EST. 1999

Second World War Veterans in Britain 2020





Marking the 75th anniversary of VE Day

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On behalf of The Cambridge Russian-Speaking Society we would like to greet you with the 75th anniversary of VE day.

Over the years of our charitable work in the UK we have had the pleasure and honour to get to know our local heroes – veterans of the Second World War.

We would like to use this opportunity to introduce them to you and share their short biographies, many of whom, as you will see, took active part in Arctic convoys.

Please join us in marking this seminal anniversary and celebrating these remarkable people.

**With warm regards,
CamRuSS**





My dear friends at the Cambridge Russian-Speaking Society,

Thank you so much for your lovely get well card. Your good wishes kept me sane during some of the darkest moments of my life.

This outbreak of coronavirus is causing havoc and disruption in our lives but it will never do anything to spoil the love and friendship which exists between us.

I will miss attending the various anniversaries taking place during 2020 but my main aim at present is to regain my good health and celebrate my 97th birthday in September! And hope very much that we meet again in the not too distant future.

I treasure our friendship very much and send my best wishes to you all.

**Love,
Jimmy (James) Baynes**



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From A Survivor To The Lost

by Mr Stanley BALLARD

I saw then first in dawn's grey light
And gazed upon that wondrous sight
A Cockney lad of nervous years
Too young to stem those heartfelt tears
Caressed by rain from leaden sky
Shielded shame from dampened eye
The oil and grime of Gladstone Dock
The fleeting glance of Liver's clock,
The journey that's so far from home
Boy turned to man so much alone
To follow in ancestral ways
Kismet, Hymns in halyards stays
Murmurs from those gone before
In distance from that valiant shore
The danger from beneath the sea
No thoughts of death caressing me
In trackless wastes we know not where
In tempest then no time to care
Destiny blends our happy crew
Steel plate and sea a life anew
No time to question pain or fear
On Friendships that we hold so dear
And when fate showed it's ugly hand
And took those from this happy band
In their place reality
Bonded in immortality

**From The Likes Of You and Me
To Them Least We Forget**

**HMS Goodall
Sunk Loss 150 Men
1930 - 29th April 1945**



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Mr (Ernie) Baden HALL was born on 01 June 1925 in Deanshanger, Northants.

Attended the local school, took up apprenticeship in Wolverton Carriage Works at the age of 14. When he was 18 he received call up papers and joined the Royal Navy. His first posting was Portsmouth Barracks which served as a hoofing post until a permanent place was found. He was only there for 6 weeks and then sent to HMS Revenge in Faslane, Scotland, to a seamanship training course. After completing, Baden was sent to Southampton to join the destroyer HMS Zodiac which became his home for the next 3 ½ years. It was during these years that he went on the Russian Convoys.

They sailed either from Loch Ewe or Scapa Flow, out into the North Sea, to make their way to Polyarny in the north of Russia. Each convoy took 10 days, weather permitting, and then spent 10 days in Russia before making the homeward voyage, bringing the unloaded merchant ships home.

Baden left the Navy in 1946, and returned to complete his apprenticeship. After several years working at the carriage works he decided to leave and take up employment at the Vauxhall Motors in Luton, where he remained until his retirement. He went to Russia on multiple occasions and was awarded the Russian Ushakov Medal together with other veterans.



Mr Cyril BANKS was born in 1923.

He enlisted in the Royal Navy on 1 February 1943, aged 18, and joined the minesweeper HMS Ready. His first months at sea were spent in the harsh Arctic convoys and in the North Sea patrolling for German U-Boats. HMS Ready was then deployed to the Channel to help with the mine-sweeping efforts leading up to the D-Day Landings. On D-Day itself HMS Ready led the mine-clearing flotilla off Gold Beach. Under constant threat of being hit by coastal guns or German aircraft, it was a grueling task, both physically and mentally.

Cyril later served on LST (Landing Ship, Tank) craft in the Channel before sailing to the Far East, where he took part in operations against the Japanese and assisted in the repatriation of Australian POWs.

In 1999 Cyril first encountered The Not Forgotten, found a community and has become a great ambassador for The Not Forgotten, fundraising for us at Stansted Airport, abseiling 110ft off a water tower at the tender age of 88 and wing-walking for 12 minutes on a bi-plane that reached speeds of 90mph.

«I never thought retirement could be so full of life. The Not Forgotten has given me so many opportunities to meet other veterans, young and old, and I have made so many good memories.»



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Mr Stanley BALLARD was born in Pimlico, Westminster in 1923.

On 21 June 1941 he joined the Royal Navy. During the War, he was a leading seaman in submarine detection service (ASDICs) on board HMS Southdown Destroyer in 1941 and later HMS Cotton in 1943, which took part in the Arctic convoys. He was part of the convoy to Iceland and then to Russia in 1945. HMS Cotton was in the last convoy of the war, the last ship that sank. Stan saw the HMS Goodall sinking.

Stan is very proud of his white beret, only worn by those who fought in the Arctic. It has a black band to represent the shipmates lost up there. For his bravery in the Arctic convoys, Stanley Ballard, among other veterans, received from President Putin the Russian Ushakov medal in 2012.

Stan has a great voice and likes singing 'The Way We Were'. He sung this song in the Hall of Glory at the Central Museum of the Great Patriotic War in Moscow on 29 November 2013, when he was visiting Moscow with a group of British veterans of Arctic Convoys who were awarded the Arctic Star medal by the U.K. government.



Mr Frederick Vic BASHFORD was born in 1921.

During the Second World War Cpl Vic Bashford, as a young Royal Air Force Electrical Fitter, was involved in Force Benedict, a secret mission to protect the northern Russia port of Murmansk, that was a crucial lifeline to the Soviets. The aircraft, the first 39 of nearly 3,000 Hurricanes supplied, were transported in August 1941 by the Aircraft Carrier HMS Argos and SS Llanstephen Castle in the first Arctic Convoy between the UK and Russia. Throughout the Second World War 104 merchant ships and 20 Royal Navy ships were lost in the Arctic Convoy duties. Fortunately, Bashford survived this ordeal.

In 2013 Frederick (Vic) Bashford, a 92 years old, was one of the few surviving WWII veterans who were recently awarded the Arctic Star campaign medal. In Sept of 2016 Vic Bashford went back to North Russia to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Operation Dervish convoy and was overwhelmed by the reception of the Russian people.



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*«You were so bloody cold. You wore a life-jacket in bed – not for safety but to keep warm... If the escort was depth-charging, dead fish would come to the surface, instantly frozen. Being sunk didn't bear thinking about. I saw two ships torpedoed in my convoy. They didn't blow up but just lost speed and started lagging farther and farther behind. Poor b***ers. You just hoped a rescue ship got to them... The Russians didn't talk to us much – there was the language barrier and they were scared of being seen with foreigners. Stalin, you see. They were starving – they ate our scraps, anything».*



Mr Ernest KENNEDY was born in 1924.

As a Royal Navy gunner, he served on an American-built Liberty ship which sailed to the Russian ports of Murmansk and Archangelsk between 1941 and 1945. He made 12 voyages to Russia on the SS Samlyth and HMS Ocean. Unlike many Royal Navy seamen who never had the chance to set foot in Russia, Mr Kennedy spent time on land. Ernie visited Russia after the war as well. In 2005, among the British delegation of survivors of the Arctic convoys, he visited Murmansk to meet the Russian Convoy Club veterans and to remember those who lie at the bottom of the Barents Sea.

In 2015 Ernie visited Moscow again and on the 9th of May watched the Russian military parade on the Red Square to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the great Victory over fascist Germany. Together with two comrades, Geoff Shelton and David Craig, Ernest were seated by President Putin in the VIP booth.

The strategic positioning ensured that TV images that flashed around the world included the three Britons wearing their medals and Arctic convoy white berets. Ernie was one of the founding members of The Russian Convoys Club (London & Home Counties).



Mr David KENNEDY was born on 19 March 1926.

Joined the Navy at Devonport, served on HMS Domett K473 which was an American built Captain Class frigate on loan from the Americans. This ship formed part of the 3rd Escort Group and was sold for scrap in America in 1947.

One of the journeys was from Loch Ewe to Poliarny Murmansk. When his ship was unable to dock she moored along an adjoining river. They tied up and there was a field with some Russian children playing with a ball. Some of the shipmates joined in a game of football and soon became very warm due to the heavy clothes needed for crossing the Arctic. Meanwhile, German artillery fire could be heard from their position in the field.

On another occasion when HMS Domett tied up, it did so alongside a Russian ship. Domett's postman had to board the Russian ship in order to reach the shore and collect the post. He was invited below deck for a celebratory Vodka or two. Needless to say shipmates on HMS Domett never received their post that day. A member of the Kennington branch of the Russian Arctic Convoy Club until it's closure in 2017.



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Mr Ernest DAVIES was born in 1925.

At 18 Ernie signed up for the Royal Navy. *"Almost all of my friends went to war – I simply had to do my part,"* he says. Served in the war for 4 years – 1943-1947 in the convoys to the Atlantic and the last two convoys to Russia as able seaman: on HMS Cotton together with Stan Ballard. All Arctic convoy ships braved German air raids to deliver the much needed military equipment and food supplies to the USSR. It was then that he came to Russia for the first time, and the only thing he regrets now is not having learned the language. His ship was patrolling English Channel during D-Day. He doesn't consider himself a war hero.

Ernest Davies travelled to Moscow for "The Arctic Star to Russia" event in the Central Museum of the Great Patriotic War. Was a member of the Kennington branch of the Russian Arctic Convoy Club until its closure in 2017.

«We carried on with the convoy until we reached our base at Greenock, Scotland just as Peace was declared in Europe. As we entered the harbour everybody was cheering and the merchant ships were blowing their sirens and effigies of Hitler were hanging from their derricks. Our captain ordered "Splice the main brace" (a double issue of neat rum)».



Mr Seymour TAYLOR was born on 07 December 1924 in London, England.

Volunteered for the Royal Navy in 1942 as a 17½ y.o. After training at Portsmouth was sent to a Cruiser HMS Emerald – a part of large convoy escorting troop ships to the Mediterranean then joining the Eastern Fleet covering a lot of the Indian Ocean, the Bay of Bengal and the Burma Coast. Upon the return to Portsmouth was sent to Newcastle and joined the crew on a new Corvette named HMS Farnham Castle K413 as Quarter Master (Helmsman). After sea trials this ship joined the Home Fleet and became part of the Russian Arctic Convoys. In 1944 returned to Britain for the D-Day landings as a part of the 10th Cruiser Squadron, and on the 6th June 1944 crossed The Channel with the Invasion Force. The Minesweepers had cleared a channel to the French Coast and HMS Farnham Castle K413 followed them to the coast. There were six Cruisers in line along the coast. Seymour's action station was 'No 6 a 6" Gun. When the landings started they commenced shelling the German positions until the troops had secured the beaches. And they were still at their original position in July, keeping watch and sleeping on the coconut matting around the gun. The last convoy Seymour escorted was JW66 to Murmansk. We docked alongside two Canadian Destroyers whose crew made the Brits most welcome. After a few days HMS Farnham Castle K413 left Polyarny with Convoy RA66, homeward bound.

Left the Royal Navy, A1 in July 1946 after volunteering for and passing a Radar Course on the Isle of Man and receiving the Radar Badge.



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Mr Hugh DESBOROUGH was born in 1924 in Elsworth, Cambs.

In 1942 signed up to join the Royal Navy at an enlistment station on King Street in Cambridge.

Served on three Arctic Convoys aboard HMS Striker aircraft carrier. Now lives in Waterbeach and has 4 children, six grandchildren and 9 great-grandchildren, and his memories of the Arctic Convoys are still strong as ever. Hugh believes in importance of keeping alive the memory of the sacrifices made by seamen on the convoys.

Was awarded the Ushakov medal by the Russian government.

«I was too young to understand because I was 17 when I joined up. I'd done my training and presumed I was going on a submarine. I suppose we were all nervous – you thought of your mother a lot, I did anyway... It was very cold, we'd got no warm clothing at all. Our feet were always frozen (but) on the second convoy we did have a big long socks that came up to your thighs that kept your feet and thighs warm».



Capt Rolfe MONTIETH was born on 30 October 1923 in Canada.

Joined the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) in 1941 and served with the Royal Navy for the remainder of the Second World War. During 1943 served as a Midshipman on HMS Hardy, a Royal Navy destroyer that was part of the Home Fleet based in Scapa Flow. The job was to meet the Arctic convoys that had been assembled at Loch Ewe and to escort them on their journey from the entrance of the loch to their ultimate destination in Russia. Shortly after Rolfe's appointment ashore, while shepherding yet another convoy to Murmansk HMS Hardy was torpedoed and sunk on 30 January 1944. Twelve of Rolfe's close shipmates perished. These journeys were extremely dangerous. Many of his relatives and friends were killed serving in the Royal Air Force bomber command.

Received officer training at the Royal Navy College Dartmouth in 1941 and continued to serve in the Royal Canadian Navy until 1969 with degrees in Marine and Aeronautical Engineering. The Cold War was the focus of studies then. Rolfe did not then and still does not believe in war as a solution to solve conflicts. This was one of the reasons behind his decision to leave the Navy. Moved to the UK in 1970 and joined Babcock, a major engineering conglomerate where he worked for over 16 years as a lead engineer. This allowed him to travel the world and meet fascinating people.

In 2014 Rolfe received the Arctic Star and the Russian Ushakov medal. A privileged member of the Russian Arctic Convoy Association.



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«This was my baptism to the war at sea and there were several hairy adventures. In February 1943 while bringing a convoy from Benghazi to Alex we struck a mine. One enormous explosion, Erica sank and I suffered severe burns. It's a small world... I found myself on the Southern Maid, one of the escorts, and her signalman had been with me at Collingwood. I was flown to the 63rd General Hospital in Cairo. There were beautiful beds that didn't roll about, beautiful clean sheets and beautiful nurses. When I was discharged and given a warrant to travel back to Alex I looked like something out of a pantomime. I had lost everything and the hospital patched me up with whatever gear they could find».

Mr James (Jimmy) BAYNES was born on 07 Sept 1923 in East Ham.

Left school at 14 to work as an apprentice in the printing industry. In 1942 began a career as a signalman on HMS Collingwood. Was drafted to the Middle East, joined a flower class corvette Erica based in Alexandria, Egypt, a part of the Second Escort Group which escorted convoys along the North African coast in support of General Montgomery and the Desert Rats.

2 years later joined the colony class frigate Anguilla and took part in the Arctic convoy. In 2014, was presented with the Ushakov Medal by Ambassador A. Yakovenko at the Russian Embassy in London. Feels extremely fortunate to have reached the age of 90 and able to have contact with events which took place a lifetime ago.



«I could not have imagined myself how hard these missions would be. In those harsh conditions we all grew up and matured quickly».



Mr Sid TIFFIN was born on 23 Sept 1924.

After turning 18 enrolled into Royal Navy. From the very beginning was taking part in the Arctic Convoys going to Russia. Served on cruise "Berwick" as a sailor of the 1st class. Usually we would depart from Scapa Flow in Scotland and sail to Russia protecting convoy ships loaded with goods. Sid's duty post was on the low deck by the crates with ammunition. If our ship had been bombed he would not have survived. Of all the hardships of the sailing freezing cold was the worst thing to endure. Waves crashed on the deck, water froze on the deck, the rigging, guns and weapons. Sailors constantly had to break off that ice using axes to prevent icy cover getting too thick making our ship extra heavy. Besides there was an ever-present danger of attack by German U-boats and air bombers.

After that mission Sid was sent to the Far East, Philippines. When they arrived there we were giving orders to proceed to Hong Kong which we had to liberate from the Japanese.



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«You had at the back of your mind if you have to abandon your ship the chances of survival were almost nil. In other words, death sentence. Maybe I was lucky to go to Murmansk and return safely. I always carried what my mother gave me, a knitted sailor, and I carried that throughout the whole of my naval career».

«I was given a number. I didn't know what it was – a battleship, a submarine or what. I was dispatched to Glasgow to the Yarrows ship building where I joined a brand new sloop, the HMS Wild Goose».

«When the presenter introduced me she (The Queen) congratulated me on the receipt of the Ushakov Russian bravery medal. She was very pleasant... smiled... It was fairly brief, but rewarding».

Mr Cornelius A.R. (Tony) SNELLING was born on 01 April 1923.

At 18 signed up to the Royal Navy and was given just six weeks' training. For 4 years, between 1942 – 1946, served as a Seaman on HMS Wild Goose, Black swan class sloop, employed on anti-submarine operations in North Atlantic Bay of Biscay and Arctic under command of Captain F. J. Walker. Completed one Arctic Convoy mission on HMS Goose. The conditions endured by men on Arctic Convoys were horrific. The thought of family & friends back home helped him through.

Tony has two children, five grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Made an effort to stay in touch with other veterans of the Arctic Convoys: joined Capt Walker's Old Boys Association, then the Russian Convoy Club as a way to make sure their memories stayed alive.

Has been decorated with medals from the UK and abroad, including The Arctic Star medal and one of the highest honours in Russia, the Ushakov medal. Had the privilege of meeting the Queen after receiving the Ushakov medal.



Mr Albert FOULSER was born on 11 August 1924 in Walthamstow, North East London.

Left school at 14 and trained as a cabinet maker. At 18 received his call-up papers and had a four-month basic training at HMS Glendower at Pwllheli. Got posted to HMS Walker converted to a Long Range Escort (LRE) where he met Bill Perks, the two became shipmates and close friends on Atlantic Convoys to Gibraltar and Arctic Convoys to Murmansk until HMS Walker was paid off at the end of the war. They next met at the Cenotaph in 2005 when they were awarded the Arctic Emblem.

By April 1943 Londonderry (the shore base for escort duties to Gibraltar) was responsible for 149 escort and anti-submarine patrol vessels, 2,000 shore-based personnel and 20,000 British and Canadian seamen. Albert was on five Arctic Convoys to Polyarny, the Russian naval base near Murmansk on the Kola inlet from 1944 to early 1945. He took lots of photograph as the only person with a camera on the ship. In January 1944 they were fitted out with cold weather gear for escorting Arctic Convoys. HMS Walker with HMS Keppell, Beagle and Boadicea formed the 8th Escort Group, part of the Close Escort for convoys to the Kola inlet in North Russia under overall command of Vice-Admiral F Dalrymple-Hamilton RN. The convoys of merchant ships formed up in Loch Ewe. HMS Walker escorted ships from Liverpool and the Clyde to the assembly point at Loch Ewe.

Albert is 95 and still in good health living with his wife in Essex.



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«...Scorpion went down to Portsmouth in preparation for the invasion of Normandy in 6 June 1944. Again, Scorpion was in action early escorting the mine sweepers in their task of clearing the mines on the night of 5 June for the invasion fleet. At dawn on 6 June (D-Day), Scorpion was in place for the bombardment of the shore defenses. The first British ship to be sunk by German E-boats was a sister ship of Scorpion, so she chased the German E-boat but did not catch it.»

Mr John WASS was born on 25 December 1923 in Nottinghamshire.

Left school at 16 and joined the Royal Navy in November 1941. After training as a Telegraphist/Coder, joined a newly built fleet destroyer HMS Scorpion at Scapa Flow, a class of the most modern destroyers with 4 guns of 4.7 inch caliber, 8 torpedoes, 20mm guns in pairs and a Bofors gun of 8 barrels for defense against aircraft, plus a large number of depth charge throwers to combat submarines. With Radar, Sonar and high speed she was a very formidable ship.

John's combat service in the Navy: from 1942 to 1945 on HMS Scorpion. The main duty was escorting and defending merchant ships in convoy to Russia carrying arms and war material to Murmansk and Archangel for use by the Red Army. John completed 16 convoys, saw a lot of action from German aircraft and U-boats.

After several months off the French shore, bombarding gun installations, including V1 rocket sites, in October 1944 Scorpion was ordered back to Scapa Flow and continued with Russian convoy duties, thus John served on HMS Scorpion for 3 years until war ended on 8 May 1945. Graduated from the Forestry Commission College and worked for the Forestry Research Centre travelling all over England and Wales. Later started his own company. John has 3 children, 6 grandchildren (2 grandsons went into maritime jobs). In addition to other medals, been awarded with the Ushakov medal and the French Légion d'honneur (Legion of honour).

The convoys suffered a heavy setback in July 1942 when they suffered a week of heavy attacks by the Germans. Convoy PQ17 was almost completely destroyed - 24 of the 35 merchant vessels were sunk with the loss of 153 mariners. The 35 ships and six naval auxiliaries making up the convoy contained 297 aircraft, 594 tanks, 4246 vehicles and gun carriers, and more than 156000 tons of additional cargo, enough to equip five Soviet divisions. Only 10 ships and four auxiliaries reached their destination.

Prime Minister Churchill later wrote it was «one of the most melancholy naval episodes in the whole of the war».

Arctic Convoy: counting the cost

- More than 3,000 British men and women died on the convoys which began in 1941.
- A total of 78 convoys sailed to and from northern Russia during the war.
- 5,000 tanks and 7,000 aircraft, as well as trucks, ammunition and other supplies were delivered.
- More than 100 ships were lost to surface, air and submarine attack.

In July 1942 only 11 of 39 ships reached the Kola Peninsula. Hundreds died as ships were picked off by German aircraft and U-boats. More than 200 aircraft, 400 tanks and 3,350 other vehicles were lost.

About 3,000 Merchant Navy and Royal Navy men perished in the Arctic between 1941 and 1945 while attempting to deliver supplies to the Soviet Union. The vast majority have no grave. They simply disappeared into grey-green depths - freezing to death in minutes after falling into the water, or succumbing to wounds or the cold in open lifeboats. Others were simply blown apart by bombs or torpedoes delivered by Luftwaffe bombers or U-boats. Winter provided 24-hour darkness but pack ice forced convoys to move nearer to German bases in Norway. Summer provided more open sea but 24-hour daylight for the attackers.



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British veterans visit with members of CamRuSS.

24 September 2015.

Churchill College, Cambridge.

Front row: Tony Snelling, Ernie Kennedy, Ernie and June Davies, Eve Bagley, Baden and Eunice Hall, Hugh Desborough, Seymour Taylor, Stan Ballard, veteran's aide.

Standing: the members of CamRuSS.

