

CHAPTER XVIIIMOSCOW MISSIONARY

I decided that there was little point in my resuming duties on the experimental side at C.O.H.Q as I could not envisage our having a lot to do with the war in the Pacific. Tom Hussey was not very pleased about this but gave me his consent and I applied for another appointment. This pleased my opposite number as he obviously had designs on my job; and its possibilities for a brass hat, no doubt.

The new appointment, when it came, was to a naval team under Admiral Baillie-Grohman, which was to be the first party into Kiel to deal with the surrender of the German navy. We commenced duties by having a series of lectures on the subject, during which we were treated like everyone else in London to the inconvenience of buzz-bombing at all hours. The lectures came to an end and there was little sign of our troops getting anywhere near Kiel so I kicked my heels for a day or two. Then I got a telephone message from the Admiralty to prepare to leave the country for an unknown, or at least unspecified, destination. I enquired whether I should pack a suitcase to include tropical uniform and was told bluntly "on the contrary" but was instructed to call at the Naval Intelligence Department at the Admiralty. Here I was informed that I had been appointed Chief Staff Officer to Admiral Archer, Head of the British Mission to Russia and that as soon as the Russians had granted me a visa I should be transported there by North Russian convoy. I seemed to be maintaining my status of naval 'jack of all trades'. At all events, I could not complain that this was not a complete change.

In a small department in the basement of the Admiralty I was introduced to the complexities of life in Moscow and advised on what kit to take. I was also subjected to what I assumed to be a high level security screening by a Colonel of Marines, who asked how long I had known Admiral Archer. I replied that to the best of my knowledge I had never met him and this seemed to cause my interrogator some concern.

"But he asked for you by name", he insisted.

"In that case you must have the wrong Middleton", I said. "I don't want to go all the way to Moscow to be told to go home again.

The colonel left the room, apparently to make further enquiries and when he returned he seemed as puzzled as ever. He told me that there was no doubt that I was the person Admiral Archer had asked for and indeed there was no other Commander Middleton in the navy at that time. On this rather unsatisfactory note the interview ended and I was left in suspense as to the answer to the puzzle until I eventually arrived in Moscow.

My visa arrived and soon afterwards instructions for joining a convoy to Russia. As the senior officer travelling to Polyarnoe, the naval port in the Kola inlet to which we were going, I was put in charge of about 100 naval ratings who were being sent to Russia for various duties. In fact, I had only to get them to Scapa Flow, where they were dispersed amongst ships of the convoy but I managed to get them all there. Travelling with me were a number of naval officers also bound for Russia. Victor Tate, senior naval interpreter in Moscow and his brother, John Tate, who was going back to Murmansk. They had both been home on leave. There were also one or two others, bound for either Polyarnoe, Murmansk or Archangel. It was a long train journey and we had all had enough of it when we arrived at Inverness about nine o'clock at night. Here we changed trains and were not a little disturbed to find that by Scottish licensing laws the station buffet bar was closed.



We arrived at Thurso at about eight o'clock in the morning and had an excellent breakfast at the Royal hotel before embarking in the ferry at Scrabster for Scapa Flow. At Scapa the ferry went alongside "Dunluce Castle" where we disembarked awaiting onward passage to the ships in which we were taking passage. The whole party split up and I finally arrived on board H.M.S. "Caesar", the senior destroyer escort, commanded by Captain Brewer. We were not sailing until next day so in the evening I went ashore to taste the delights of Kirkwall or Stromness, cannot remember which, with some of "Caesar's" officers. When we got back on board a sing-song was in progress with Captain Brewer at the piano and a very cheerful and noisy party it was.

There was, of course, no cabin for me and I think I slept on the wardroom settee or possibly in the sick-bay that night but once we were at sea I had a cabin aft. At sea, all the officers slept close to the bridge and Captain Brewer suggested that I might either do that or, if I preferred, use one of the comfortable cabins aft. As I had no official action station I thought I might as well be comfortable so I chose the cabin. It was just a little eerie being in the deserted after flat all by myself but it was very comfortable. When we got up towards the arctic circle <sup>and</sup> ~~air~~ the weather got bad ~~and~~ it was quite a business getting aft. Seas washed across the upper deck and I had to use the cat-walk, making a dash for the companion leading below in between seas.

My signal training allowed me to take over a good deal of the deciphering and most days I was kept pretty busy at this work. I would spend some time each day on the bridge and was kept in the picture as to what was happening by Captain (D). Once we had picked up our convoy of merchant ships we swept ahead, zig-zagging and generally waltzed about as escorts do. In the evenings after dinner we usually had a poker school but as the days got shorter and gloomier they tended to drag badly. Off Bear island we flew planes from the carriers in the hour or so of twilight available and I could only feel intense admiration for the pilots taking off from those heaving decks over the icy water.

In fact, it was not unduly cold on deck considering that it was early December but winter comes late and goes late in that part of the world. I believe Archangel is ice free until after Christmas but once frozen does not clear until late June.

There was little sign of the enemy and from reports it seemed that most of the U-boats were clustered off the west coast of Britain. We had one or two submarine contacts by Asdic and approaching Polyarnoe carried out an attack after one of the escorts reported an acoustic torpedo had been fired at her. The attack was without result but on sailing for home Cambria, one of the escort destroyers, was sunk not far from the Kola inlet.

We berthed alongside a big wooden wharf at Polyarnoe and I was interested to see a man leading a large bear in chains. The bear was carrying a log exactly as in the "bear and ragged staff" coat of arms of the earls of Warwick.

In the evening I went to a concert at the Red Army club with some of Caesar's officers. This started with a cultural lecture, in Russian of course, which lasted three-quarters of an hour but having sat through that the concert itself was first class and the singing of a very high standard. There was dancing in the interval but the Russian Wrens were all very plain and sturdy so I was not tempted to cut in.

Returning to the ship, we lost the road in the complete darkness and found ourselves descending an icy slope at high speed, to land up with a resounding crash in a heap at the bottom! On board a sing-song was in progress with Captain Brewer at the piano, the ship having been invaded by officers from Caprice, Tavy and Bahamas. None of them seemed to be quite what they purported to be and when someone cut his hand badly slicing bread for sandwiches, there was a cry of protest when a Surgeon-Lieutenant said he would stitch up the wound. It then transpired that they had all swapped reefers and the 'doc' was really the Captain of Bahamas and unskilled as a sempster. It was a riotous evening and as I was now back to sleeping on the wardroom settee I could not go to bed until the party was over.

On Saturday, 9th December, 1944, I made my farewells, which included a drink on board Caprice and two glasses of port with Captain Brewer who was kind enough to say he appreciated the help I had given on board and that he would be happy to have me in his ship if I were looking for a job. I must say I was sorry to leave Caesar which was a very happy ship.

I made my number to Admiral Egerton, the Senior British Naval Officer for North Russia and then made my way to the naval mess for a bath and a sleep. I had had a good deal to drink and very little sleep in the last two days and my stomach was beginning to complain. In fact, it was very bad for some time but I suppose it served me right.

Victor Tate, with whom I was now re-united, and I left by launch for Murmansk on the Monday afternoon, where we met Commander Fitzgerald and Sub-Lieutenant Rae, also Commander Nelson, R.N.R. and Mr McGregor of the Ministry of War Transport. By now I was feeling very poorly so I begged to be excused dinner and retired to my room at the Intourist hotel. I did not see much of Murmansk but remember the general method of giving traffic signals which was to open the door of the vehicle on the side to which you were going to turn. It looked highly dangerous. The traffic controllers were all sturdy militia-women, the militia in Russia being the equivalent of our police but very much more military in appearance and armament!



My room at the Intourist hotel had a small entrance lobby with a washbowl and the bedroom was rather stark and sparsely furnished. My main preoccupation was rest so I was soon in bed and the light out<sup>1</sup>. I had got nicely off to sleep when there was a knock at the door and an English speaking woman member of the hotel staff came in and asked if I required anything. I said I would very much like a cup of tea and she replied that it would be sent up immediately. It never arrived. But later in the night I was awakened with an itching sensation familiar from my early seafaring days and switching on the light I beheld an army of bugs marching across the floor of the room from the wall on the opposite side and climbing steadily up the bedclothes towards the delicious objective, me. I have never seen such a horde of the horrible things before or since and the slaughter was disgusting. I had been given some D.D.T. for my journey and this, carefully applied, prevented further attacks and I slept peacefully until called <sup>to</sup> ~~at~~ breakfast by Victor Tate. Breakfast consisted of garlic sausage, red caviare, cheese and smoked salmon, of which I had a small slice of smoked salmon with a slice of bread and butter and a glass of tea. Victor explained that in Russia men always drink tea out of glasses and only women use cups. I was already beginning to enjoy my tea Russian fashion - rather weak with no milk. I do not remember every~~y~~ being offered lemon.

Victor said that there had nearly been a tragedy at Vaenga yesterday. The Russians caught some stevedores with tinned food from the cargo of a British ship and they confessed that they had got it from some of the British sailors, no doubt by barter. The Russian Officer went on board the British ship and informed the Captain, saying that they had arrested all concerned and did he wish them to deal with his men as well as the Russians. The Captain had had a great deal of trouble with his crew, who were an unruly crowd and thought it would do them good to have a taste of Russian justice, so he said he would be glad if they would deal with all the culprits. The whole lot were marched away by a squad of militiamen. Fortunately, one of the British naval officers attached to Vaenga came along the wharf just as the men were being marched away. He dashed on board and asked what had happened and on being told by the Captain exclaimed 'My God' and dashed ashore again. Just as he ran round the back of one of the dock warehouses a volley of shots rang out and with sinking heart he prepared to face the worst. As it happened, the Russians had kindly decided to shoot their malefactors first and the naval officer was able to rescue a very, very frightened lot of British sailors just as they were being lined up for the coup de grace. No doubt, it was a lesson that none of them is likely to forget.

At the station we joined milling hordes round the train for Moscow but our places were booked and Victor and I had a comfortable four berth compartment in a 'soft' coach. Four naval ratings and a large case of beer occupied another. We had full provisions for the journey, including a small tin of caviare. Leaving Murmansk the train was hauled by a large electric locomotive and Victor explained that lines were electrified for about sixty miles round cities and then reverted to steam locomotives, fired almost entirely on wood billets. I calculated later that we averaged something like 15 miles an hour over the journey of about 1,300 miles. The broad gauge track and slow speed made it very comfortable, if somewhat boring, progression.

With the long trip ahead of us and very little to do, we soon got to know a lot of fellow passengers and, in fact, became a compact travelling community. The train's electrician frequently called to discuss his difficulties and Victor, who was born in Russia, not merely spoke Russian but such superior Russian of Tsarist days that people came along just to hear him speak. He translated most of the conversations as he went along and if he ~~flattered~~<sup>flattered</sup> it was not because he could not understand the Russian, it was because he did not know the appropriate English word. I remember one occasion in Moscow when we were discussing the arrangements for the Yalta conference I was asking the Russian naval liaison officer about the navigational aids in the Black sea and said to Victor:-

"Ask him the characteristic of the Chersonese lighthouse".

Victor looked at me in astonishment, saying:-

"In Russia we do not understand a lighthouse; or a heavy house, for that matter!"

On another occasion he was talking about a lady walking in the street with her tortoise and it was sometime before ~~he~~<sup>we</sup> realised this was merely a matter of Victor's accent and that he meant 'daughters'. After the war he became an official interpreter at United Nations and, I believe, died in America. He was an extremely kind, pleasant man.

On the train was a Russian colonel who was returning from leave and who walked the length of the train to find a suitable companion for the journey. He chose a very tough looking female soldier, who took over the duties apparently cheerfully enough and was no doubt grateful for the extra rations and greater comfort of a 'soft' coach.

Between many of the stops travellers rode on the buffers between the coaches and some even on top, where it must have been bitterly cold. At frequent intervals our Marouska or carriage attendant would appear with the usual formula "Pazholsta chai?" Please, tea? and glasses of steaming tea would be handed in. Unfortunately the availability of tea was governed by her personal whim and the supply of wood billets for the fire.



Indeed, on one occasion she said that if we wanted any more tea we must get down at the next stop and help gather some wood, which we did. The difficulties mentioned led to tea arriving at very odd hours and on one night she woke us at 2 a.m. with her usual bright "Pazholsta chai?" We drank it principally with the idea of maintaining the supply.

The lavatories were quite unusable after the first few hours, due to the fact that few Russians can have experienced a flushing toilet and in any case the necessary water was either missing or frozen. On a four day journey this is a considerable handicap and it was necessary to keep on a low residue diet, like an <sup>v</sup>astonaut. In fact, the Intourist hotel in Murmansk was little better than the train in this respect. Perhaps the influence of television and its insistence on cleanliness in these matters may have had some beneficial effect.

Also on the train was a young airman, a Hero of the Soviet Union, who had been on a long spree in celebration of his decoration and who was accompanied by a morose naval petty officer whose job it was to see that he returned to his unit in one piece. At one point the young Hero started firing his revolver through the carriage window at targets by the line and of course became very cold in consequence. His protector obviously did not have much hope for his own success or survival.

At various stops a village market was formed with the natives selling eggs and chickens and so on to the passengers. Many of the men on board stripped off and had baths in the snow, which looked very invigorating in the sunshine. In the north the scenery consisted almost entirely of wooded country with conifers and birches with little clearings in which there were rather desolate-looking log huts and little streams, some still flowing. Further south there were plains with burnt out tanks and vehicles scattered about and half hidden by the snow.

We ended up by being half a day late and eventually pulled into Moscow at about midnight, to be met by Arthur Cox, an army captain attached to the mission who I took for a Russian at first sight. He drove us to the Admiral's flat in the Arbat and, much to my relief, I was not told that I was the wrong Middleton but welcomed very warmly by both Admiral Archer and his secretary, Lieutenant-Commander Stuart Spittle. Stuart and Victor had quarters adjoining the Admirals and were firm friends. I was then driven to my quarters, a very pleasant flat in the Skatertni Rereulok (Tablecloth Lane) which I found I was to share with Arthur Cox, Major Ted Croft and Squadron-Leader Boris Trapp. They all spoke Russian so I was at a distinct disadvantage. In fact, they spoke several other languages as well and I often had to ask what tongue was being spoken on the radio and please could I have a bit of English?

The next day was a Saturday and after breakfast I went to the headquarters of the Mission (officially, The British Military Mission, Moscow), which was always known as 'Dom Dyeset' House ten, and situated in the Uletza Kharitonevsky, almost opposite the Russian Admiralty.

I had a long session with the Admiral who put me in the picture as to the general situation and my own duties. I drew 500 roubles and some cold weather gear and was invited by the Admiral to go for a walk with him next day and have tea at his dacha, a little wooden week-end house outside Moscow.

Back at Skatertui I found we had a luncheon party and amongst the guests were Eddie Gilmour, correspondent of Associated Press and his charming Russian wife, Tamara, Mr and Mrs Smith of the Canadian Embassy and Brigadier 'Pop' Hill, who appeared to have some sort of roving cloak and dagger job. The first course was pancakes with sour cream, melted butter, caviare and smoked salmon, followed by bortsch, the famous beetroot soup, mutton with various vegetables and honeycomb mould. The drinks started with vodka followed by Russian wine and finished with Russian brandy. All excellent and a distinct change from 'K' rations on the Normandy beaches or even U.K. rations at home. All the same, I would willingly have swapped it all to be home again as already I found the Russian atmosphere menacing and depressing and I wondered whether we should be allowed out of the

country when it was time to go.

My walk with the Admiral next day was frankly ludicrous. Someone lent me a pair of fur-lined flying boots as suitable footwear for walking and nothing could have been more mistaken. They had smooth leather soles and as Admiral Archer in his goloshes strode confidently along the icy paths through the birch trees and jumped over frozen streams, I went along in a series of cartwheels with my feet apparently determined to change places with my head. As it got dusk, I suppose about three o'clock, matters got worse and I came a tremendous cropper which knocked all the breath out of my body. The Admiral, who up to then had treated the whole thing as a huge joke, staged for his particular benefit, now became entirely sympathetic and endeavoured to guide me over the more lethal ice patches. At the dacha the man and woman who acted as caretakers had tea ready and shortly afterwards we drove back to Moscow.

I walked with the Admiral on a number of occasions and was warned in advance that he refused to carry his 'propusk' or pass to move about Moscow and the authorities were rather cross about this. In order to make their point they had him accosted at intervals by militiamen or secret police with a request to show his pass. To this he invariably replied,

"You know quite well who I am. I am the head of the British Mission".



To this the reply was that failing a pass he must accompany them to the police station until his identity could be established. So the Admiral would then have to wait in the cooler until Stuart Spittle arrived with his pass to bail him out.

On one walk I thought we were in real trouble. The Admiral decided that he would climb down the bank onto the Moscow river and walk along it to the Kusnetsky Most, the bridge where his car was waiting to pick us up. It was pretty clear to me that walking on the Moscow river was not a pastime the Russians encouraged and sure enough as we slithered along the icy surface in mid-stream a shout from the bank, followed by one from the bridge, made it clear we had been observed. Admiral Archer took no notice at all and a moment later came the crack of a rifle and the whine of a bullet.

"I don't believe they approve of our being here, Middleton", he said. "Perhaps we had better climb the bank".

This we did to be met by a very irate militia man who, I am glad to say, was content to examine my propusk and accept my vouching for the Admiral. After this exploit I was rather less keen on accepting invitations to walk.

My main job in Moscow was to maintain liaison with the Russian navy, which we did by meeting once a week, and occasionally more often, not at the Admiralty across the road but at a dingy little house in a suburb some distance away,

known as a Foreign Relations Otdel. At these meetings I would produce a list of queries, suggestions and problems on all sorts of naval and general seafaring matters which might interest the Russians or which they might be able to answer for us. They would produce a similar list to operate in the reverse direction. Unfortunately, although we were usually able to deal with their queries fairly promptly, they hardly answered any of ours so that the list of outstanding matters got longer and longer and every week the British Admiralty would send us irate signals asking when we were going to wake up and do something. The longer I was in Russia the more like something out of Alice in Wonderland things became. At times it was like one of those nightmares when you feel as if you were moving in treacle and the harder you strive the slower you go. This, combined with unending leaden skies and hordes of padded, felt-booted, shuffling expressionless people, would have driven me to the vodka bottle in earnest had it not been for the fact that my stomach was still very tender and I dare not drink to excess for fear of the consequences. In fact, I was pretty miserable.

The one great boon was the magnificent Russian theatre. The language difficulty naturally inclined one towards the ballet as a form of entertainment but after seeing 'School for Scandal' performed in Russian I decided that with actors such as those I had seen, language was almost unnecessary. Of course, I did know

the plot, which helped. Ballet was normally performed at the Bolshoi theatre, the ~~Filial~~<sup>Filial</sup> and the Stanislavsky, the major company occupying the Bolshoi with some of their younger ballerinas taking leading parts at the other two theatres. The Mission got a special ration of tickets and it was usually possible to go to the Bolshoi once a week and the other theatres possibly more often. For the citizens of Moscow it was not so easy and there was usually a bit of ticket-touting in reverse going on outside the Bolshoi. A visiting British army officer was walking into the foyer of the Bolshoi with his ticket in his hand when he suddenly felt it snatched away and a handful of rouble notes thrust in its place. Before he could recover from his surprise the man had gone, no doubt to enjoy an illicit evening watching the delectable Ulanova.

The British and Commonwealth Community in Moscow had decided to get together for a big New Year's party and I was soon involved in arrangements for this with representatives of our Embassy, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. There were to be 400 guests of almost every nationality ~~but not~~<sup>except</sup> the Japanese, who were still neutral as far as the Russians were concerned. Other parties were also in evidence and I was inclined to wonder how diplomats kept their figures with the amount of solid eating and drinking they appear<sup>ed</sup> to do.

Christmas Day arrived and we all sat down to a splendid meal at 'CominterA', the building where most of the mission staff lived together. This was once the palace of a wealthy sugar merchant and there were still signs of the magnificence with which he surrounded himself. Yet close by would be a narrow lane with timber buildings which must have been there for centuries. They looked rather like the log huts of North America and Canada only more ornate. After Christmas dinner there was just time for a short nap and then we were off to the British Embassy for a magnificent party there. It occurred to me that I was having a queer mixture of a war with a fairly quick transition from a fox-hole in Normandy to a lush party in an Embassy. These rather drastic changes keep one alert as you not only have to switch to entirely different work and different methods but also get to know a complete new set of people and try and gauge their reactions. There is more to being a jack of all trades than is sometimes suggested.

I had already started my Russian lessons, which were held in a small room in the basement of No. 10 with the Embassy teacher, Vera Petrovna. She was a widow, or at any rate husbandless, with two pleasant daughters. They lived in a tiny flat which they appeared not to share with anyone so the Russians must have had some regard for her abilities, which no doubt included keeping tabs on all of us at the mission. In addition, it was said, that an attractive Russian girl was always 'planted' to make the acquaintance of newcomers to Moscow and in exchange for bed and board these



females would not only provide home comforts but also see that your Russian speaking improved rapidly. Indeed, if any member of the mission spoke really good Russian he automatically labelled himself as having an official mistress. Whether Admiral Archer approved or disapproved of this system I never found out but there was no doubt about it being an efficient method of learning the language.

Some members of the mission went as far as to marry Russian girls but it was extremely difficult, if not impossible, to get an exit visa for them. I was discussing this with a Russian on one occasion and he said:-

"I don't understand why your people want to take these girls back to England. Are you very short of women there? It is understood that they need a wife here but why try and remove her from her homeland? I think you are very funny people!"

Not only in the matter of wives did the Russians adopt a very practical, if unethical, view of life. In Moscow the shop which always had the best goods for sale was the Red Army store. As the name implied, only members of the Red Army could shop there. One day I asked jokingly if they also got a special discount on the goods they bought and to my surprise the reply was 'Yes'. I cannot remember the exact figures but it was something to the effect that a Marshal of the Red Army got 50% discount, a General 40%, a Colonel 30%, down to a sergeant 5% and a private nothing.

I said I thought this would be considered undemocratic in my country and that our soldiers would expect it to be the other way round, with the privates getting the best discount because of their small pay. My Russian friend was incredulous,

"How could we do that with all our millions of private soldiers? The store would go broke in a week. Besides, it is necessary to encourage men to get promotion".

Like many other incidents, this gave me an insight into an aspect of communism I had <sup>not</sup> heard of outside Russia. Another illuminating remark informed me that the purpose of the Trade Unions in Russia is to tell the workers what the government wants <sup>e</sup> them to do, and what will happen if they don't. I sometimes feel that the quickest way of curing people of communist leanings would be to let them have a little practical experience of Russian communism. I believe they would soon be voting for a return to the dear old days of capitalism. Certainly few of the avowed communists who went to Russia during the war found Russian ways to their liking and the Russians generally took an instinctive dislike to them, usually asking for them to be removed to their own country forthwith.

The big new year's eve party at Commtern went off very well with a really cosmopolitan collection of guests from most of the embassies, Afghan, Egyptian, Ethiopian, Chinese, Turkish and Icelandic amongst others. Of course, all the allied nations

were well represented. I was rather depressed and had a cold so I left the party early - at 3.0 a.m. I had really had more than enough of parties and wished I had more interesting work to do.

Towards the end of January Captain Collingwood arrived to inspect an acoustic torpedo, which the Russians had captured intact with a German U-boat off Kronstadt. Captain Walker also arrived from Archangel on his way home, so we had a fair amount of entertaining and showing the sights to do. Captain Collingwood stayed at Skatert~~ni~~ until he got permission to go to Leningrad where his mission proved pretty well abortive due to non-co-operation by our allies. I enjoyed the company of Captain Collingwood, who was a mathematician and scientist of world reputation. He asked to see the famous Russian scientist, *Kapitza* and managed to meet him but said the conversation was somewhat restricted. I believe that Collingwood had worked with *Kapitza* at one time.

On his return from Leningrad, Collingwood told me the Russians had promised to let him have micro films of the German acoustic torpedo manual and other vital information and impressed on me the necessity for this to be forwarded to him swiftly and by safe hand, which I agreed to do. Years afterwards I met a naval officer who dealt with the films on arrival and he told me that so far from being of vital importance they were the Russian equivalent of a Mickey Mouse episode! One needed a very flexible sense of humour to be able to retain one's sanity when working in  
Russia.

Not that I disliked the Russians as a people. I found them extremely hospitable and undoubtedly very talented in all the arts, but with an odd eastern outlook coupled with an almost inhumanly practical outlook. For instance, when we were trying to rescue allied prisoners from the areas into which the Russians had advanced, they made it clear that they quite understood that we might wish to save a colonel but viewed with grave suspicion the fact that we were anxious about two Ghurka privates. As in the case of wives, they said we must be very short of men to bother about privates and coloured ones at that. It was obviously no way to win a war, expending effort on such expendables. In fact, we did at last get <sup>the Gurkas</sup> ~~them~~ to Moscow, where they died in hospital. The head of our prisoner recovery team, Colonel Hurndall, was angry and distressed <sup>that</sup> ~~as~~ he was not able to see them alive, poor little men.

Shortly after this Admiral Archer was due to go to Yalta to attend the conferehce there, at which Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill were meeting. We assumed that Stalin would take an even tougher line on his own ground than he had previously and as seen from our vantage point in Moscow the outlook was very bleak. All politicians appeared to think the Russians would re-act favourably to their particular brand of bonhomie, which we knew would never be the case. It is surprising how many otherwise intelligent people insist on keeping a dog and barking themselves!



Even then they frequently make the further mistake of barking at their friends and fawning on the enemy.

At this time, or possibly nearer the collapse of the German forces, I read the official prognostication of events following the end of the war in Europe and the line the Russians might be expected to take. It emanated from the Foreign Office and could not have been more wrong in the event if it had been prepared by a meteorological forecaster. At times it seemed that we were winning the war in spite of our leaders, rather than because of them. In war time it does not seem to matter if you make mistakes as long as you continue to ignore them.

Admiral Archer wished to get to Yalta a day or two ahead of the Prime Minister and his entourage in order to make sure that preparations were complete. The Russians were insisting that everything was ready while our man on the spot, Boris Trapp, said that one of the roads it might be necessary to use had four feet of snow on it. The Russians said that if it was necessary to clear it they would do so. When it was pointed out that there was hardly any snow-clearing machinery available, they replied that 20,000 men could do it in a day with shovels, and the men were available, if required.

All the Admiral's requests for permission to fly to Yalta were politely but firmly refused and in the end he asked why he should not go to the station, buy a ticket and go by train?

No reason at all, was the polite reply. Could he have a propusk? asked the Admiral. Certainly, came the answer. There is something funny going on here, said all the experts on Russian behaviour. And there was.

Admiral Archer with secretary, Stuart Spittle, and interpreter, Victor Tate, arrived at the station, received a red carpet welcome and were ushered into a private waiting-room with aspidestras, ormolu clock, fringed table-cloth and other evidence of Victorian influence. Tea and vodka was offered with sticky cakes. Admiral Archer looked very suspicious of the whole proceedings and even more so when an official apologised and said the train from the Crimea had been delayed and was now some two hundred miles from Moscow. I went back to No. 10 and promised to keep in touch. Next morning, about 7 o'clock, my telephone rang and a slightly hysterical Admiral said,

"We are still here, Middleton. Be a good chap and come and fetch us so that we can have a bath".

Eventually they left that night and arrived at Yalta exactly at the time the Russians had proposed in the first place. To stop a scheduled train running and keep all the passengers hanging about for 24 hours seemed an odd way of saying 'no' diplomatically, if that was what it was.

While the Admiral was away I had a good deal of highly technical details to settle, mostly in connection with 'Franconia'

and the other ships coming into the Black Sea for the Conference. At first I came to a dead stop because the Russian naval staff would not deal with a mere Pod-Palkovnik, to use the Russian method of giving a naval commander his equivalent military rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. So after some discussion with my army and air force colleagues, it was decided to promote me to acting head of the naval mission with the implication that I was, therefore, also an acting Rear Admiral. This immediately did the trick and I had no trouble in further meetings with the Russian staff.

I had rather more trouble with the American naval staff who wished to re-arrange some of the routes in the Black Sea. These had all been agreed previously and Admiral Archer had left me with instructions not to change anything at the last minute unless I was convinced that it was absolutely essential. Rear Admiral Olsen, head of the American naval mission, and one of his captains went to work on me with all sorts of persuasions and dark hints but I stuck to my guns and eventually they capitulated. I am happy to say that all went well in the Black Sea as far as I could ascertain and at least there were no disasters; but it was a worrying time for me as I had no one whatever to turn to for advice or moral support.

On Wednesday, 14th February, Admiral Archer and party were due back from Yalta and at intervals from one o'clock onwards I went to the station to meet them.

Rather like the outward journey, the train seemed to be stuck somewhere and it was not until six o'clock next morning that it actually arrived. With the 'phone going at intervals all night, I was feeling a bit part-worn by then. With the Admiral's party were General Laylock, Chief of Combined Operations and Anthony Head, both of whom I knew well. We all went to the Tchaikovsky Hall to see a ballet concert in the evening and I remember we were sitting near a Spaniard who had been a member of the famous Blue Division and who had a lot to say to us, in English. Bob Laylock and Anthony Head only stayed a day or two and then left for England, conveniently taking some letters for me, which I hoped would arrive quicker than the usual pony express.

Towards the end of February, the Admiral told me I should be going to Odessa with Ted Croft to supervise the embarkation of ex-prisoners of war liberated by the Russians in their advance. I was pleased to have the opportunity to see a bit more of Russia and as I got on well with Ted Croft I thought it would be a pleasant assignment. Ted was an interpreter but always a little bit diffident about his Russian. The Russians never seemed to have any difficulty in understanding him though and he certainly seemed to be able to translate anything they said.



Before leaving for Odessa I attended a Red Army Day party at Spiridonevsky, the building used by the Russians for official entertaining. The party was given by Molotov and crowded with Marshals, Generals and other senior officers and officials of all nations. The food and drink was lavish and exotic, whole fish and poultry, highly decorated, making centre-pieces for the tables. There was a very good concert lasting about an hour and then, after the eating, dancing. I danced with a pleasant young Russian girl, with whom I was just about able to converse with a mixture of Russian, French and English. I was told afterwards that she was a niece of Molotov's and I remember he appeared to be watching us closely. Seeing all the wonderful food, bright lights and general gaiety, I could not help comparing it with the long queues waiting for their daily ration of black bread that we had passed on our way there.

We left Moscow for Odessa on Sunday, 25th February, and soon settled down to train routine. One of the highlights of the journey was crossing the Dnieper by way of a long shaky-looking wooden bridge, which was obviously a replacement for one blown up during the fighting. The train stopped halfway across and the sheer drop to the river was terrifying. Great lumps of ice were being carried along by the current and hitting the supports of the bridge. We were all pleased to reach the safety of the other side.

On the Wednesday our train was running through the outskirts of Odessa where there were many signs of fierce fighting and much devastation. On arrival we were taken to the London Hotel, on the front overlooking the harbour, where Ted Croft and I shared a large bedroom with an annexe containing a bath. After three days in the train we decided to make use of it at once but were disappointed to find we could only obtain a dribble of tepid water. On releasing the plug we discovered that no waste pipe was fitted and the water

just ran out onto the floor. Ted hailed the witch-like attendant for our floor and on enquiring of her why no waste pipe was fitted she replied tartly,

"What, and do me out of a job?"

Odessa has an odd mixture of architecture and a lot of cobble stones in the streets but I found it an attractive city. The docks were in ruins and a good deal of demolition had gone on all over the place. It was not very long since the Germans had left, of course. I explored the harbour and arrangements for docking the ships coming to take the ex-prisoners home and Ted Croft inspected the camps and made contact with the men. Next day I also went round the camps and got a tremendous welcome the troops - army and R.A.F. but no naval personnel - saying, "It's the navy! Now we know we really are going home!" Most of them were in fairly good shape but their stories were horrifying. As the Russians advanced they were careful to eliminate any possibility of guerilla warfare in their rear and I got the impression that many ex-prisoners received the treatment designed for their enemies. Some of the R.A.F. chaps had never been in enemy hands but had been on the run ever since they were shot down, being given food and shelter by friendly Poles and passed on when the search got hot. I remember Flying Officer Such who was the elected leader in one camp, with whom I had some extremely interesting talks. He was a remarkable young man. I think it was with this party that we found Miss Walker, an elderly English schoolmistress, who had spent the whole war in enemy territory, helping our men to escape or evade capture. The Russians had tried several times to remove her for interrogation but her loyal band of ex-prisoners stoutly refused to give her up. We held a conference on how we were going to get her on board ship and her bodyguard said that if she was not allowed to go, they would not go.

The ships, Highland Princess, Moreton Bay and Duchess of Bedford, arrived on Monday, 5th March, and somewhere about this time I received a telegram from Colonel Naps, Brinckman in Moscow to say that my father had died. I had tremendous affection and admiration for him and I had to go away and shed a few tears. He was 85 years of age and had been in Sir Garnet Wolsey's army of the Nile, which was sent to the relief of General Gordon. My brother, having gone through the whole of the 1914-18 war, we had seen a fair amount of service between us.

There was now a great deal of seamanlike work to be done so I had no time to mope. The Highland Princess docked at noon and her complement of Russian ex-prisoners of war who had been released by the advance of our troops began to disembark. They had all been kitted up in British uniforms and looked typical British soldiers. The ships officers said they were the best behaved troops they had ever carried. I suppose few of them had ever seen a ship before, let alone travelled in one. As soon as the Russians were off the ship we commenced embarking our people who were delighted to set foot on British territory again.

Next ship in was Moreton Bay where the same routine was followed. Captain Graysdon, her master, did not seem to like my R.N.V.R. stripes and said quite bluntly that he did not propose to take orders from a yachtsman. His chief officer, who was standing beside him said quietly:



"Middleton had his tickets long before I did and taught me quite a lot when we were at sea together, so I think you can take it that he knows what he is doing".

This was Tillot, who was a midshipman with me in King George V, and his intervention was timely as I think I might have had some difficulty otherwise. It was hard enough dealing with the Russians without having any more awkward customers. Captain Grayson said,

"Then what's he doing masquerading in that outfit? He ought to have R.N.R. stripes!"

I explained how I came to be in the wavy navy and from then on we got along splendidly and everything went very efficiently.

Miss Walker and her band were got aboard Moreton Bay safely but not without a bit of rather high-handed bluff by Ted Croft, who carried it off beautifully - and in impeccable Russian.

Duchess of Bedford, a Canadian Pacific liner from the St. Lawrence run, was the largest of the three ships, rather shallow draught and with inward turning propellers. In fact, a ship-handlers nightmare. Her captain, whose name was Knight, insisted on having tugs for berthing and I saw the Inflat Chief who agreed to provide two. The pilot, whose name was Dimchenkov, had not impressed Captain Knight by insisting on knowing what the deviation of the gyro compass was.



No amount of explaining that it had no deviation satisfied him so in the end he was told it was  $\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  west and this he carefully recorded in his note book.

When the time came for the Duchess to enter harbour, no tugs were in evidence but Dimchenkov said, "Look, tugs come" and sure enough smoke was rising from the funnels of two tugs right across on the other side of the harbour. Not until afterwards did I learn that both were holed and sitting firmly on the bottom!

Nevertheless, Pilot Dimchenkov proved himself an expert, whatever he may have thought about deviation, and in an increasing wind he berthed the awkward Duchess as cleanly and smoothly as anyone could wish. Which was just as well for me as Captain Knight was breathing fire and brimstone over the lack of tugs.

I lived on board the Duchess for some days and thoroughly enjoyed ship-life again. Apart from Tillott I met an old Pangbournian, Waters, and became very friendly with most of the ships officers who seemed quite impressed with the fact that I had acted as agent and general factotum for them.

Moving about the docks was hazardous as gangs of women were still lifting mines and piling them in great heaps by the roadside. From here they were collected by lorries and one afternoon there was a loud explosion as lorry, women and mines all disappeared in a cloud of smoke.

One of the sentries in the docks was an elderly female who showed every sign of being trigger happy. One evening she had obviously been at the vodka and started loosing off in all directions until a Russian officer came along and put an abrupt stop to her enjoyment.

Hordes of German prisoners, terribly emaciated, were working round the docks and on one occasion I saw about forty of them try and lift a rail where the lines were being repaired. They could not get it off the ground and presently stood motionless, like men who long ago lost all hope in life.

The Duchess sailed and life went flat again. We went to the opera and saw 'Traviata' and to the ballet and saw 'Fadyetta' performed to the music of Delibes 'Sylvia'. We were awaiting the arrival of a special prisoner of war rescue team from England who were going to remain in Odessa and carry on the repatriation work. When they arrived we spent a day or two showing them the ropes. With them, on behalf of the British Red Cross came Mrs Thorold, wife of Air Vice Marshal Thorold, who headed the R.A.F. contingent in Moscow. She was a bundle of efficient energy and I have no doubt was able to do more for any ex-prisoners arriving at Odessa than half a dozen ordinary mortals.

We left Odessa on Sunday, 18th March, having been there eighteen days. Eighteen exceptionally full, busy and rewarding days.

The train journey home was a bit of an anti-climax and we were all glad to be back in Moscow - a thing I never expected to feel. Life became a routine again with a lot of paper work, some interesting problems and abortive meetings with my Russian colleagues, Captain Egipko and Mike Kostrinsky. Mike was a very pleasant chap and spoke rather better English than Victor Tate who, I gathered, spoke rather better, or at least, more high-class Russian than either Mike or Captain Egipko. Victor informed me privately that they spoke like peasants.

In April, Roosevelt died and I attended the memorial service held at Spasso, the American headquarters in Moscow. Averell Harriman, their ambassador, spoke movingly of the President's life and work and I think we all felt that it was a tremendous loss. It cast a great gloom over what was fast becoming a period of cheerful optimism, with allied successes reported daily and magnificent victory salutes being fired nightly in Moscow. These salutes were very impressive, each salvo of guns being accompanied by a great burst of thousands of coloured rockets which not only illuminated the sky but reflected clearly in the icy snow on the roof-tops and silhouetted the pinnacles and towers of the ancient buildings.

I was able to get a little time off now as we seemed to have run into a quieter period after the flurry of Yalta and the abortive efforts to find out something about the captured U-boat and its accoustic torpedoes. I had also been engaged for some weeks trying to get information on what the Russians did about ships icing up in arctic conditions but they were obviously quite determined not to give anything of value away. I believe they looked on us not so much as allies as potential enemies with memories possibly of our north Russian expedition after the 1914-18 war. Once again I suppose they were being severely practical and the ally of today can easily become the enemy of tomorrow. It did not make for a very happy atmosphere naturally. However, I was able to make two excursions with Ted Croft and Boris Trapp, one to a fine old monastery at Zagorsk, not far from Moscow, where the oldest church dated back to 1322. The place was now a museum but the religious pictures and ikons were carefully preserved and, no doubt, priceless, although not a form of art for which I could raise any great enthusiasm. I had earlier had the good fortune to be able to make a conducted tour of the Kremlin, which was specially laid on for the benefit of Air Chief Marshall Tedder and altogether saw a good deal of Russia's treasures and learned something of her history. One amusing little incident occurred in a room said to be furnished exactly as used by Catherine the Great and we noted, with some surprise, a modern, bright red telephone by the bedside.



Our guide noticed this with a smile and said that although Russia undoubtedly invented the telephone the period was in fact somewhat later than the 18th century.

By this time I was beginning to get bored at having little or no work to do. I had received a letter from my solicitors asking when I was likely to be back in England as they thought a meeting with Leonard Hutchings was necessary to settle our dispute over shares and other matters. The end of the war in Europe was now clearly at hand and I decided that unless the cessation of hostilities brought new work I would ask Admiral Archer if he could spare me for a few weeks when Germany surrendered.

On the 1st May I accompanied Admiral Archer and Air Vice Marshall Thorold to the May Day parade in the Red Square, where we had a special V.I.P.s viewing platform alongside Lenin's tomb. On top of the tomb was Stalin <sup>with</sup> ~~and~~ other members of the government and high ranking officers. I was very surprised at the comparatively small number of spectators, even in the Red Square. There were hardly any in the streets. When I discussed this later with my Russian teacher, Vera Petrovna, she said:-

"It is Stalin's show, not ours, so why should we expect to see it?"

It was in fact a magnificent show and it went off without a hitch, in spite of the hundreds of items of equipment and many

thousands of men involved. Again, when I commented on the slickness with which it was run, Vera Petrovna said,

"Oh, yes. People say it is run by the stage manager of the Bolshoi theatre!"

This might well have been the truth. The Russians are very practical.

Mrs Churchill, who had been in Russia with a Red Cross mission, arrived back in Moscow about this time and with the news of the surrender of north-west Germany and the German forces in Denmark it seemed the war in Europe was virtually over. Admiral Archer received instructions to prepare to fly to Berlin for the surrender in case there was some difficulty in our representatives getting there from the west. He eventually left at very short notice and later gave me a very graphic description of the devastation of the German capital and the actual surrender ceremony itself. It remains vividly in my memory and I felt that I was highly privileged to be so close to the core of world events.

Mrs Churchill, who was travelling in the Prime Minister's personal 'Skymaster', was due to leave Russia shortly and after tackling the Admiral on the subject of leave, which he granted with the remark that he thought he would follow shortly, I approached Tomkins, one of the Embassy secretaries, who was dealing with Mrs Churchill's arrangements and asked if he thought there was

any chance of my getting a lift in her plane. He said he would ask her and when I met her shortly afterwards she said she would be happy to take me back to England. This was marvellous as the 'grey funnel' route via Polyarnoe would probably have taken a month.

As it was I made my adieus to my Russian and other colleagues one day, drinking an enormous amount of vodka in the process. That night I went to the gala performance of "Swan Lake" at the Bolshoi in honour of Mrs Churchill's departure. Uncle Joe Stalin appeared in person; in the State box, of course.

Next morning, feeling very frail indeed, I was driven to Moscow airport where hordes of high-ups were gathered to see Mrs Churchill off. There were mountains of flowers and during a tour of inspection of the plane so many people were right aft looking at the Prime Minister's own room that she started to lift her nose wheel and there was a frantic cry to get some weight forward.

We took off about eleven o'clock and flew south to the Black Sea and along the Bosporus. It was a beautiful sunny cloudless day and I remember seeing the Dardanelles and Sea of Marmora spread out like a relief map below. Across the Aegean the islands sat like jewels in the blue sea and Malta appeared

in a sparkle of twinkling lights as dusk fell and we landed at Luca airport.

Mrs Churchill was whisked off to Government House but we stayed comfortably in the R.A.F. mess, to which I donated the programme of 'Swan Lake' <sup>performed</sup> at the Bolshoi the night before.

We took off again about 1.0 a.m. and when I awoke had crossed the Alps and were over France. I had breakfast looking down on Paris with the Eiffel Tower an unmistakable landmark and went forward to sit in the co-pilot's seat as we crossed the coast over Arundel castle. A few minutes later I was trying to pick out my house at Ruislip as we circled to land at Northolt but I failed to do so.

We touched down a few minutes early and although the Russian Ambassador, Lord Chatfield, and her daughters, Sarah and Mary were there to greet Mrs Churchill, the Prime Minister did not arrive until some five minutes later. He shook his fist at ~~Wing Commander~~ our pilot, and hurried Mrs Churchill back on board the plane and closed the door. Later he shook hands with us and they all drove off.

I was given an R.A.F. car to take me home, which was little more than a mile away, and I said good-bye to my travelling companions, Brigadier Hill, Murray Mathieson and David Floyd. As my car reached the end of the road in which I lived my elder



daughter, Jill, was waiting for a bus to take her to her dancing class. She said "Hallo, Daddy" and as the bus was just coming up we had to move on and off she went. I suppose wars have very little impact at that age.