

# **The Unknown Pages of The Second World War: The Tragedy of S. S. “Induna”**

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## Introduction

For several years we have been involved in the activity of our school Arctic Convoys museum. Carrying out excursions, giving talks, participating in various contests connected with the museum activity, we study the Convoys history. We can't say that there is lack of information on the history of the Convoys. This theme is reflected in the official documents, historical literature, magazine and newspaper articles. We also consider that Veterans' memories and letters are a crucial source of historical knowledge. Although the Convoys history is described rather well in the historical works there are some unknown pages of it. Reading and translating British Veterans' memories and letters we have come across one of these unknown pages. It is the tragic story of the British steamer "Induna" and her crew.

So the object of our research is the unknown pages of the Second World War. The subject of our research is the story of S.S. "Induna" and her crew. We have taken the story of one ship as an example of hazards of the Arctic Convoys, heroism and courage of sailors, cooperation of different nations in the struggle against fascism.

On the screen you can see the methods of our research, our hypothesis and the stages of the research.

Ways of the research work used while writing this paper are the following: reading, analyses and translation of letters and memories of the crew members, interviewing participants of those events.

Our hypothesis is the following: if we analyze the Veterans' memories and letters, literature on the Convoys history we'll find out and clear the unknown pages of the military operations in the Arctic, the sailors' attitude to them, relations between allies during the war time-period.

The stages of our research are the determination of the theme, the acquaintance with literature on the Convoys history, studying paper and magazine articles, Veterans' memories and letters, the advancement of the hypothesis, proving it and coming to the conclusions.

We believe that our research is very important nowadays. There are some problems in the relations between the Russian and British governments. We do hope our work will remind everybody of close relationship between our countries when they used to be allies.

# CHAPTER I

## Convoy “PQ-13”

The Convoy PQ-13 left Reykjavik on 20<sup>th</sup> March, 1942. It consisted of 21 ships of several nationalities. It was destined to experience the full fury of an Arctic storm. Initially a strong south-westerly had enhanced the convoy's progress. Shortly after midday on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, when abeam and 120 miles south-east of Jan-Mayen, PQ-13 was re-routed due east. Ten hours later the convoy course was resumed to the north-eastward. PQ-13 was now several miles nearer than planned to the German airfield at Bardufoss, between Narvik and Tromso and on the 27<sup>th</sup> the convoy was widely scattered, labouring under ice and plunging through a heavy swell. Some attacks were made by Germans. The passage of PQ-13 could hardly be acclaimed a success: almost 30,000 tons of Allied merchant shipping had been sunk, more than a quarter of the convoy. There is rather pathetic note of disclaimer in the Admiralty's assessment of these losses as being stragglers an implicit inference that somehow it was the fault of the merchant ships that they had been lost, whereas two of the five had been part of the eastern group which had re-formed after dispersal by the weather and had received no close escort for the remainder of the passage. This assumption tended to blind the Admiralty to the dangers of scattering a convoy, either by order or by act of God.

Although the convoy action had demonstrated a great deal of the Royal Navy's fighting spirit, and individual ships had behaved with great gallantry, it had done little to demonstrate its fighting sense. Moreover the 'distant' units of the Home Fleet were no support whatsoever, whereas its destroyers might have been sent north to refuel from "Nigeria" and assist the hard-pressed escorts in rounding up the convoy. Poor "Trinidad" had suffered from her self-inflicted wound and both sides had serious technical defects in their torpedoes. Now the cruiser was in a foreign dry dock. The unlucky cruiser had indeed torpedoed herself. Near Kildin Island the Convoy was waiting for by German U-boats. The Soviet destroyer "Gremyashiy" destroyed one of them and provided the protection of merchant vessels.

Later experience and the received wisdom of the Admiralty would suggest that there could never be too many destroyers around a convoy even if the prospect of 'beating up' an enemy was tempting,

and doubly so if the convoy was but a fragment of the whole. It was an unfortunate, though not entirely unfounded, consequence of PQ-13 that the merchant seamen began to doubt the total commitment of the Royal Navy to their protection. If “Trinidad’s” company cheered the appearance of “Fury” there were a number of men aboard the merchant ships who afterwards wondered why she had not stuck to her original task.

Nevertheless, “Trinidad” had made port and the PQ-13/QP-9 operation had accounted for several aircraft, two U-boats and one Narvik-class destroyer. The fate of the latter made the German Seekriegsleitung even more cautious in its employment of surface forces, though an appreciation by Admiral Tovey accurately predicted that the enemy was ‘determined to do everything in his power to stop this traffic’. Correctly judging that the response of the Kriegsmarine’s heavy ships would be ‘reluctant’, the Commander-in-Chief was aware that enemy intervention would concentrate on the use of the U-boat and aircraft, formidable enough in themselves. Hitler, preparing a counter-attack against the resurgent Russians, ordered Luftwaffe reinforcements to Norway and in April the strength of the German air forces began building up.

Tovey requested the Russians to increase their submarine patrols in the Barents Sea and to step up their destroyer contribution to the last leg of the convoy route. His and Sir Dudley Pound’s representations that the convoys should be suspended during the weeks of twenty-four-hour daylight that were fast approaching were dismissed by Churchill. The Russians must, at all costs, be kept in the field. Political expedience overrode naval wisdom. Tovey consequently drew increasingly heavily on escorts from the Western Approaches Command.

## CHAPTER II

### The Tragedy of S. S. “Induna”

All the historians, Soviet and British, describes the Convoy “PQ-13” very carefully. However, they paid a lot of attention to the military actions and to the activities of the Northern Fleet and the Royal Navy. Among these events the tragedy of one merchant ship was almost unnoticed. It was the tragedy of S. S. “Induna”.

Besides her crew on board the ship there were some American sailors from the sunk ship “Ballot”. S. S. “Induna” was torpedoed by U-376 on 30<sup>th</sup> of March in 1942. In the photo you can see sailors leaving the sinking ship. Jim Campbell, one of the survivors, wrote in his memories that at first they set off Reykjavik waiting for other ships to arrive from the United States. People were told that "Tirpitz" was on the prowl, hence the about turn. The information must have been false as they left again the next afternoon. Although weather was quite pleasant, on the second day they found themselves in the middle of a mine-field. Fortunately, the mines could be seen clearly. During the night the navy disappeared, and they heard that "Tirpitz" was again on the move. Later the same day the weather deteriorated. German bomber played havoc with them, sinking at least two ships. Mr. Campbell writes: "I must confess that this to me as a young whipper-snapper was very exciting, actually being in the thick of things.

Our convoy was spread out, other ships were being sunk by U-boats. We could hear explosions. I saw waves of at least 30-40 feet high." He also admits that was a very frightening time. They were on the edge of the ice-field with a couple of other ships. The convoy had been scattered all over the ocean.

A small trawler - the "Silja" – picked up them. "Silja" had picked some survivors from an American ship, the "Ballot". They transferred to "Induna" by walking across the ice. The crew of "Induna" reversed out of the ice-field and took "Silja" in tow, but the tow rope parted. Early next morning Jim Campbell had prepared things for breakfast, when "Induna" was struck by a torpedo.

Austin Byrne, another Veteran who was a gunner on the board of “Induna”, describes this terrible moment: “Then there was a flash, a bang, and a shudder, all at once, and you felt the ship slow down, you knew that she had been hit, the stern exploded into a mass of fire. The Mate then had me help him to throw some bags over the side, these were weighted and had brass eyelets in the, so

that they would sink. I was the first to get to the boat deck. The Captain then came out of the wheel house, and asked what I was doing. It was the last time that I saw him.”

Everyone who was in the lifeboats remembers those people who went down with “Induna”. Some of them died in the fire which was caused by a torpedo, others jumped over the board to escape from heat and the last ones just were not able to leave the ship. “ I saw some of the firemen bringing up from the engine room one of the crew who was badly burned – almost black. He was dead.” (Jim Campbell). Austin Byrne tells: “I saw at least 3 men jump over board to escape the flames and the heat.” “INDUNA had been hit again with a second torpedo, and she went down very quickly. This was an awful sight. With all those men still on board her, you felt numb. We could look to see if anyone came up, bud sadly no one did.”

In their memories the Veterans tell us about the courage and selflessness of their shipmates. Some of those people lost their lives to make the young sailors live by putting them in the lifeboats. The survivors had to spend 4 days in the lifeboat in awful weather conditions of the Arctic seas. William Short remembers that in his lifeboat 17 of 34 people died.

Austin Byrne and Jim Campbell write about those sailors, didn’t panic and didn’t lose control. Moreover, they saved the lives of others by doing some skilful work on the lifeboats. Such people were also on the board of the sinking ship. “The boson of the SS BALLOT, Sam Carpenter, sat and rowed for days. If he hadn’t kept the boat on an even keel we would not be here today. I honestly don’t know where he got the strength or single-mindedness to keep going.” (Jim Campbell). “I never saw a boat lowered, with less fuss and smoothness, as these two men did it that day, on a sinking ship with an ice covered deck. As only men who were real first class seamen could do it in such conditions, sadly they both went down with the ship.” (Austin Byrne).

Being in awful conditions, sailors tried to cheer up each other.

Austin Byrne remembers an American from S. S. “Ballot”, his name was Russel Hurrison Bennet, who reached their lifeboat. He had run through the fire, over the barbed wire, his feet were very badly cut, and they were bleeding onto the ice, his clothes were burning, his hair was burnt off, his face was badly burnt, his ears were gone, his hands were a mess, his fingers were drawn and bent like claws. We grabbed him and pulled him in. That was the only time I that I heard the man groan, all of the time we were in the lifeboat.” Later he asked Austin to lit a cigarette for him. He couldn’t do it himself, so Austin put it into his mouth and then took it out when the American nodded.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> day they saw a Soviet ship. Bennet asked the sailors to turn the boat so that he could see her. Then he asked them to put an oar in his hands because he wanted to help the sailors. No one would ever know how that man was suffering, he never moaned or complained.

There was also James Anderson, who was 16 years old. "The young lad Anderson was sat up in the boat, all that he had on was a this zip jacket. Then the poor soul said "I'm frightened". I said "Pray", he asked how. I said "Talk to God in your mind, he will listen to you". The fireman who didn't help anyone during all these days spoke up, his words, I have never forgotten "We will have no praying in this boat, I am an atheist". I told him that I would pray, and there was nothing that he could do about it.

Three days later the situation changed. "The cabin boy was now very quite, he never seemed to have any hope, you could not get him to talk. The fireman who three days before had said that he was an atheist, now said "I think we should pray, only God can save us now".

Sailors had to suck the ice, which cut the mouth and broke teeth, in case there was nearly nothing to eat and to drink on the lifeboats.

On the third day a terrible thing happened. People suddenly saw a ship, but it didn't notice them and went away. "That was hard, you got an empty feeling you just felt gutted, we were on our own again. We were a small gray boat in a vast gray sea."

Then Robinson, Austin Byrne's friend, said "Tich, I can see a ship. I can see another one! I can see three!". Austin thought he had gone, but then he saw he was right. "It was wonderful to see the Russian Naval Ensign, and the broad smiles of the Russian sailors, and know that we were at last safe.

I remember looking at the boat, and thinking you served us well, you saved us. She might have saved someone else".

Having read and analyzed the Veterans' memories we have tried to present hardships and hazards which the sailors had to get through. We believe that the tragedy of the "Induna" reflects the tragic events which happened to a lot of other merchant vessels while they were travelling in the Convoys.



## CHAPTER III

### The Crew Members' Destinies

We got interested in the fact what had happened to the member of the "Induna" crew, so we managed to find information about some of them.

Unfortunately, an American sailor who Austin Byrne has written about, died in hospital of school #1. A cabin boy James Anderson, who was only 16, was suffering from frostbite. He also died in Murmansk. His death was sad and painful. They were buried in the allied cemetery of our city.

We received a letter from the sister of Norman Eric Blyth. She has told us the story of his short, but bright life. Norrie, as everyone called him, was born in Dundee, Scotland, a city famous then for its ship-building. He was a typical Scottish "laddie". He loved the nature and the freedom. He had a very highly developed sense of right and wrong, of helping the weak and defending those who could not defend themselves. Perhaps some of that, or indeed all of that was in his mind as he set sail for Russia.

Norrie left school at the age of 14 (it was the official leaving age at that time). Norrie entered a new Wireless College, so he qualified as a Radio Officer. He served first at all on the Atlantic Convoys bringing much needed supplies from America.

Norrie set off for Russia in the winter of 1942 leaving Dundee, on the east coast of Scotland, for Loch Ewe, on the west coast of Scotland. As he was about to board the train taking him there he asked his younger brother "Be sure to look after our Mother". I think he knew the destination of the Convoy. It was the "PQ-13".

There is now a cairn at the furthest point at Loch Ewe commemorating all those seamen who sailed to help the Russian people, and in so doing gave their lives. The site was chosen because it was the last glimpse they had of their homeland, Scotland.

Norrie lost his life on the 30th March 1942. He was 18 years of age.

Austin Byrne writes about the American, who was in the same lifeboat as him, and the young boy James Anderson:

"Robinson and I were the only two who could stand. I was then called to the bunk with the American in it. He put his hand out to me, it was a mess all swollen, his fingers were like claws, his knuckles were broken open, it was black as far up as I could see, above his wrist. I took his hand and then he said words to me that I will never ever forget. "WE MADE IT, KID, WE MADE IT, KID"...

The cabin boy was groaning. They were trying to get some of his clothes off so I cut his jacket up the back, the lady saw how badly frozen he was. I think the lad was more or less frozen bent, his back was black up above his waist.” Later both of them died in Murmansk and they are buried there.

William Short remembers being in the hospital in Murmansk. It was the school number 1 which had been converted. “ In the hospital, I was covered with goose grease and bandaged from head to foot in an attempt to warm me up. A tube was put into my stomach and tepid water was put down into my stomach to clear the ice that had formed there. When the bandages were removed, it was found that gangrene had started in both legs.”

In 1985 William Short was one of the first veterans to receive the North Russia Medal from the Soviet Ambassador in Glasgow, and later, he led a group of British Veterans to Russia. On one of his visits to Murmansk, William Short met one of the doctors who had been at his operation. He was amazed to see Mr. Short. At first he was speechless, but then he went around telling his friends about William – ‘We did not expect him to survive’, he said. The doctors made it possible for him to live to the ripe old age of 82 and enabled him to work for 35 years.

Bill Short recovered from his double amputation, worked for the Ministry of Defence for 35 years as a Design Draftsman, and now lives in Dunfermline, Scotland.

All the Veterans can’t help writing about the Russian people and their attitude to the foreign sailors. Jim Campbell writes: “I must say the Russian people were really marvellous, they had very little of anything, yet had no hesitation in giving what they had to us.” Everyone remembers the kindness of nurses and doctors. The Russians had always been trying to keep all the sailors cheerful, they organised concerts and even brought the films in English to show them to the patients.

Campbell, a cabin boy, lost all of the fingers from his left hand, half of his left foot, his right leg. On his right hand his index finger was permanently stiff, his other fingers were permanently bent, and all of this at 15 years old, he arrived home in time for his 16 Birthday. Now Jim Campbell lives in New Zealand.

Austin Byrne remembers J. Bell, a naval gunner. He lost both of his legs and died a few years later. He was about 24 years old.

Mr. Byrne tells us that most of the survivors had to get through the terrible pain. “ I did not know at that time but most were to loose limbs in the most horrific way, they were just chopped off, no put you to sleep, they did not have any anaesthetic, just a cover so you could not see what was going to happen. They did not give out any pain killers, they did not have any”.

Austin Byrne didn't lose the limbs, he says, that he was the lucky one. He returned home, but in 1944 he was going back to Russia, although his Mother didn't want him to do that. One sad thing was that he could not get ashore in Murmansk to find the hospital to say "Thank You".

He has been back to Murmansk in 1987 with his wife Marian after he had found Bill Short. "I needed Marian with me very much to hold my hand when I stood by the graves of the lads who had been in the same lifeboat as me, and died alone in the hospital."

We were deeply touched by the letter that the survivors from the "Induna" had written to the Soviet doctors and nurses in October, 1942. William Short sent this letter to us. It is addressed to doctor Kozikov and it is full of gratitude to the Russians. From this letter we got some information about three seamen from "Induna": Walter Baxter, John Carney and W. Pike. All of them had survived, but Carney and Baxter lost a foot and Pike lost both legs below the knee. "You said that Short, Pike, Baxter and Carney were among the worst frost-bite cases you'd ever seen. But they all say it was worth going through, what they did to help the Russians." All the sailors wanted to help the Russians. Pike, Short and Campbell decided to work in a war factory. "If they can't take cargoes to the U.S.S.R. they can make weapons for some of those Soviet soldiers we met in hospital. They were grand chaps, full of fight. All they wanted to do was to go back to the front and kill more Fascists." The British sailors wrote that they would never forget their Russian friends to whose kindness and love they owed their lives. They were proud to have received their wounds for such wonderful people.

Unfortunately, we are not able to clear the destinies of all the members of the crew. We believe some of them are lucky like Mr. Short, Mr. Campbell or Mr. Byrne. They have lived long and bright lives. However, most of them perished in the bitter waters of the Arctic like young Norman Blyth.

## Conclusions

Reading, analyzing and translating the British Veterans' memories and letters we have tried to reflect the unknown pages of the Convoys history. They provide a full picture of the tragic events of Convoy "PQ-13" considering the story of S.S. "Induna" as one of the examples.

All these considered, we have come to the conclusions:

1. The story of one ship reflects the history of military activities in the Arctic.
2. People of different nations come through the same hardships during the war-time and their lives are examples of heroism and courage.
3. There is one thing that unites all the authors of the memories – their warm feeling to our country and people.

There is no future without the past. Our research based on the memories gives a vivid opportunity to understand our present life better, value kind relations between people, their efforts providing peace.

We believe our paper can be used by English teachers while carrying out British culture studies, in the English lessons to analyze the language of that period and styles of letters and letter-writing. It can also be useful for everyone who is interested in the Second World War history.

We would like to finish our research work with these wonderful words which were sent to us by our friend, the British Convoy Veteran, Mr. Udell:

“There are no roses on a sailors' grave,  
No lilies on an ocean wave.  
The only tribute is the sea gull's sweeps  
And the teardrops that a sweetheart weeps”.

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## Annotation

Although the Convoys history is described rather well in the historical works there are some unknown pages of it, so we've tried to clear one of these unknown pages. It is the tragic story of the British steamer "Induna" and her crew, which has become the object of our research. We have taken the story of one ship as an example of hazard of the Arctic Convoys, heroism and courage of soldiers, cooperation of different nations.

Ways of the research work are the following: reading, analyses and translation of letters and memories of the crew members, interviewing participants of those events.

"The Unknown Pages of The Second World War: The Tragedy of "Induna" consists of three parts. In the first chapter the basic information on PQ-13 convoy is given, actions of the British navy fleet are described and the history of the "Trinidad" vessel is told as well as the consequences of this even are considered. The second chapter narrates about the tragedy of S.S."Induna", which deserves all the attention but is insufficiently described in the historical literature. From the third chapter the reader learns about fate of the members of this ship crew.

Carrying out our research we have provided a full picture of the tragic events of Convoy "PQ-13" considering the story of S. S. "Induna" as one of the examples. We have proved that the story of one ship reflects the history of military activities in the Arctic, that people of different nations come through the same hardships during the war-time and their lives are examples of heroism and courage, that all the authors of the memories are united by their warm feeling to our country and our people.

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