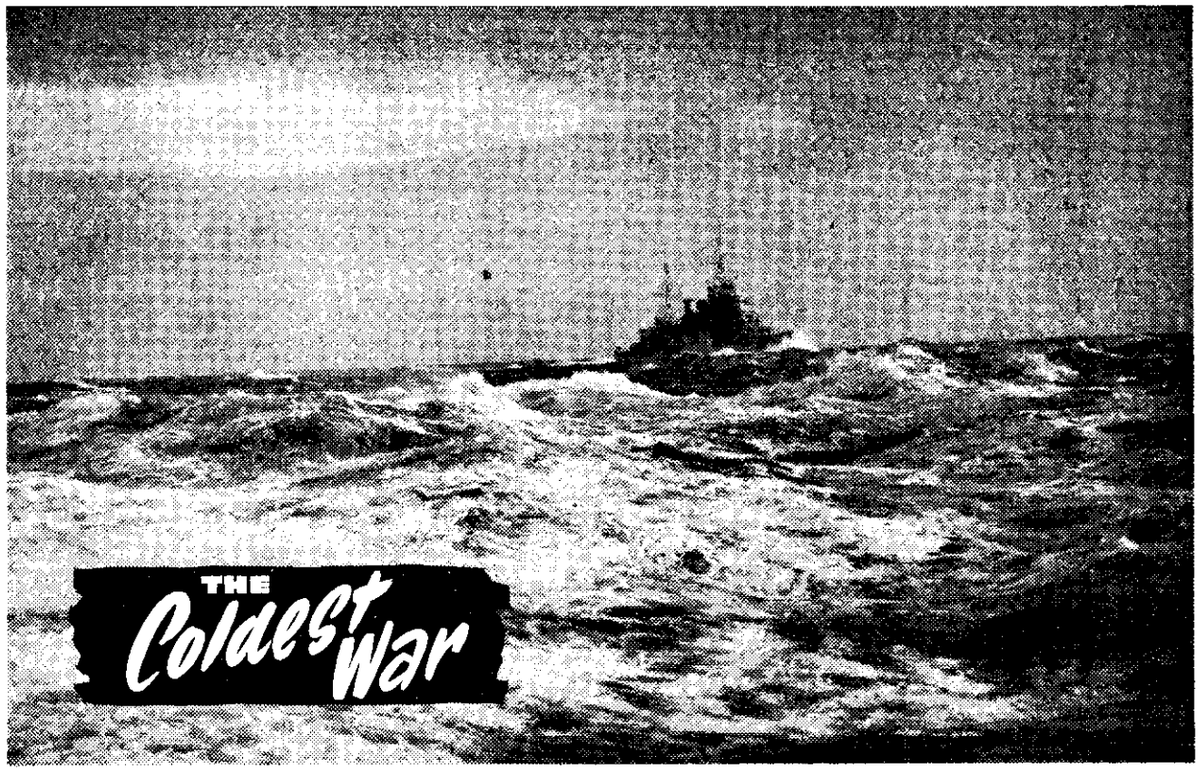


IN the history of the last war, few stories are more heroic than that of the convoys to Russia by the northern route to Murmansk and Archangel. With stoic persistence merchant ships and escorts kept a supply line going from Britain, America and Canada, at a time when the Russian need was crucial, and they did this by facing perils that were far worse than on any other convoy route—surface raiders from battleships downwards, U-boats in packs, bombers and torpedo bombers, and the implacable Arctic itself.

This is the grim stage setting for Alistair MacLean's best-selling novel *H.M.S. Ulysses*, a serial version of which will begin from 3ZB at 8.30 p.m., Friday, November 29.

H.M.S. Ulysses could be described as the story of a ship's redemption. In the misery of the North, under the constant threat of submarine attack, harried by Junkers, Condors and Heinkels from the German-held airfields of Norway, with no prospect of leave to buoy the crew up, Ulysses has seen a mutiny on board. When the story begins, the cruiser is returning again to Arctic convoy duty and the conditions that caused the mutiny. This time, however, they carry the disgrace of the ship with them —together with an unspoken determination that it will be redeemed.

"The Northern Seas, the Arctic, the black-out route to Russia—these are another world, a world utterly distinct . . .," says one of the Ulysses' officers when he pleads with the Admiralty to understand the circumstances behind the mutiny. "Conditions obtain there without either precedent or parallel in the history of war. The Russian convoys are something entirely new and quite unique in the experience of mankind."

The first convoy to Russia sailed in August of 1941. It consisted of six British tramp steamers, subsequently joined by a Soviet ship. This convoy arrived in Archangel the following month—without being attacked on route —and delivered 64 fighters, 32 special vehicles, and something like 15,000 tons of general military cargo.

By the end of 1941, this first trickle had become a flood, and an estimated 600 tanks, 800 aircraft, 1500 vehicles—plus nearly 100,000 tons of general cargo—had been shipped without loss. Thirty-six British ships and seven Russian had done the work. Later, convoys were to include ships of many Allied nations — Dutch, Norwegian, Polish and, in steadily increasing numbers, American.

The voyage was usually one of about 2500 miles. At the middle of summer it was made in almost constant daylight (apart from an hour or two of "dusk"), but in the depth of winter it was just the opposite. The constant night then was relieved only by a very brief period of grey dawn.

Before the war, even Narvik was considered to be pretty far North by British merchant captains. This idea quickly changed after convoy duty had taken some cargo vessels to within 750 miles of the North Pole, to latitude 76 degrees, where temperatures can fall to from 45 to 80 degrees of frost, where gales of hurricane strength can blow for days without respite.

From seas such as this, ships reached journey's-end looking—as one ship's captain declared—"like sugar boats that had sailed off a cake." They might be carrying 50 to 150 tons of ice—on the hull, on the decks, even inside the ship on interior bulkheads—and the masts, stays and other rigging were similarly encrusted. In conditions like these, themselves sufficiently rigorous, the ships on the Northern convoys were also fighting a war.

As mentioned earlier, the end of 1941 saw much material carried to Russia, all of it without loss. Some convoys had been attacked by enemy destroyers, but without success. It was in the spring of the following year, when daylight had lengthened and the weather improved, that the Germans intensified their attack. In March, 1942, the first outward bound ship was lost, the first of many.

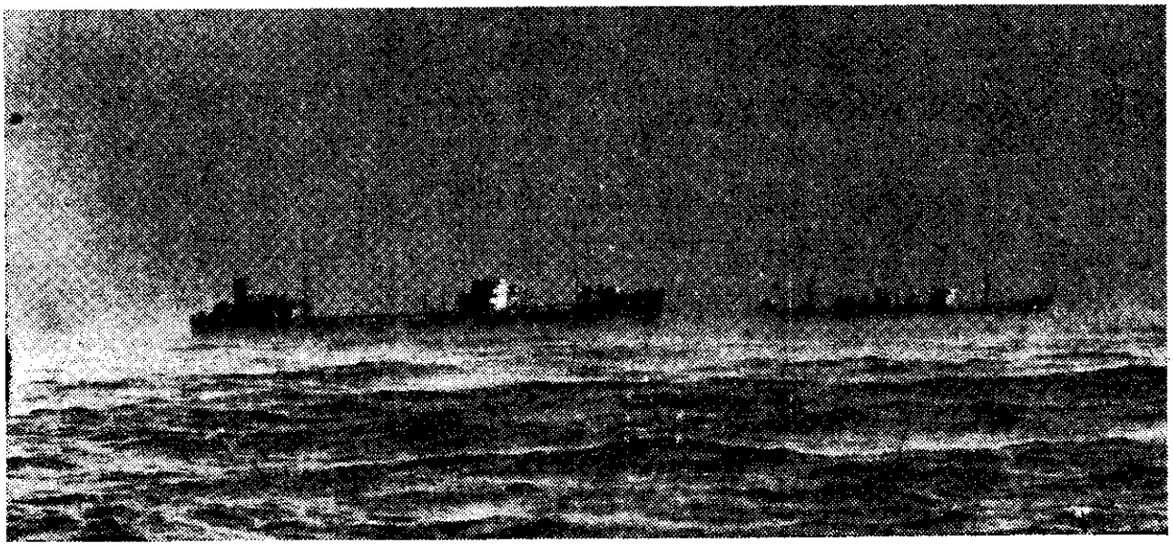
On the long exposed days when the prayer was for fog to hide in, sleep was at a minimum for everyone on board a North-bound ship. Said one captain: "There was a period of two months and 25 days when I never took all my clothes off . . . I don't think I slept undisturbed during that period for more than one and a half hours at a stretch. I used to sit with my feet up against the bookcase—you can see the marks on it."

In the light of previous strategic experience, the Navy's task of passing convoys along hundreds of miles of enemy-held coast where the air was held by the Luftwaffe and the sea patrolled by most of the surviving German surface fleet, was—in the word of one naval historian—"impossible," and things were kept moving only under terrible conditions. Convoy PQ 17, in particular, will always be remembered. Only 11 of the original 35 ships arrived.

"It recalls," read a pertinent *Time* review of *H.M.S. Ulysses*, "a cost of Lend-lease not in dollars or pounds but in unimaginable hardship."

H.M.S. Ulysses, which was adapted and produced for radio by E. Mason Wood, will be heard later from other Commercial stations.

BELOW: Tankers in convoy en route to Murmansk. The "Arctic fog" rising is caused by the difference in air and sea temperatures



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