



RACP NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2020

ISSUE 18



Welcome to the Christmas newsletter

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News

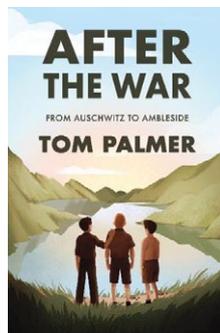
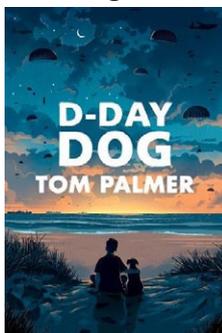
Children's Author: Tom Palmer



On 27th August this year we received a visit from prize-winning children's author, Tom Palmer, who is currently working on a new novel set on an Arctic Convoy. He made the trip to

Loch Ewe to visit our museum for research purposes and we are very happy to have been able to assist. 'Arctic Star' will be published next year. Tom has written other novels based around WWII, such as 'D-Day Dog' and 'After the War', and we are really looking forward to reading his new work once it is published.

Find out more about Tom's work on his website: tompalmer.co.uk



Merchant Navy Day

On 3rd September we flew the Red Ensign outside our museum as part of a nationwide observation of Merchant Navy Day. This day honours the brave men and women who played a critical role in both World Wars and who are crucial today in supplying almost half the food we eat, much of our fuel, among other things. Our museum was just one of hundreds of hundreds of locations across the UK, including civic buildings and landmark flagpoles. You can see a selection of photos in the [Seafarers UK Flickr album](#).



H8r0es Partnership

H8r0es are seeking to raise awareness of the sacrifices made by all those who served in WW2 through the sale of their poignantly designed pin badges. We are delighted to be one of their supported charities, which means that for each RACM pin badge sold we will receive a donation of £5, £10, or £15 - funds that are desperately required due to the severe downturn in visitors due to the Covid19 pandemic. Do take a look at their website and support us if you can. The badges are beautifully designed. www.h8r0es.com/racmp Thank you.



RACP on the Small Screen

Our Co-Chairman Francis Russell and Technical advisor & web admin Nicky Ellakirk were filmed last year by LikeashotTV at the Rubha Nan Sasan Light Anti-Aircraft Battery for the programme Abandoned Engineering. The episode explains the purpose and importance of this coastal defence battery at Loch



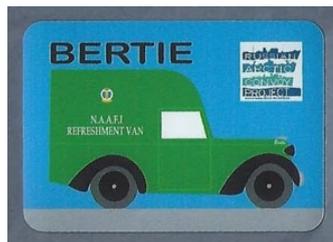
Ewe during WWII. It aired on the Yesterday Channel on 10th and 14th November, but if you missed it you can still watch the episode on demand at the following link. It is episode 7 of series 6.



<https://uktvplay.uktv.co.uk/shows/abandoned-engineering/watch-online/6205021523001>

New Shop Stock

Our Museum may be closed for the season, but you can still access our [online shop](#) for books, clothing, mugs, and gifts. We have some lovely new RACP Pin Badges, there are a few Bertie themed items and we even have some Arctic Convoy Tartan face masks for sale, among other tartan items. Many thanks to Eleisha Ruffle for allowing us to share this lovely photo of Arctic Convoy veteran Ned Ruffle wearing his tartan scarf.



International Art Competition

The Northern Convoys International Centre Foundation in St Petersburg has launched an International Art Competition dedicated to the 80th anniversary of the arrival of the first Allied convoy in the USSR on August 31, 1941. The competition is open to young people and students in the following categories: fine arts; photographic art; short video film; decorative and applied arts; literature; music; choreography; and students' scientific work. The themes of the competition are outlined in the accompanying poster and the competition terms are available at www.north-convoys.com

The competition will run from 1st July to 31st August 2021 and the awarding of the winners and runners-up will take place in St. Petersburg on 31st August 2021. See page 10 for the official poster.



Upcoming 75th Anniversary Event

Due to the Covid pandemic, the Veterans Reunion we advertised in the last Christmas Newsletter had to be postponed, and is now scheduled to take place on 15th May 2021. Around five hundred people including veterans and their families, families of those whose loved ones were involved, dignitaries and Ambassadors are expected to attend with the principle guest no less than Celia Sandys, Granddaughter of Sir Winston Churchill.

If you know of a veteran who would be interested in attending or you would like to attend please contact John Casson (johncasson@johncasson.com) for further details. See page 9 for the event poster.

Reports



Bertie the NAAFI Van Smashes

Fundraising Target

What an exciting year 2020 has been for "Bertie".

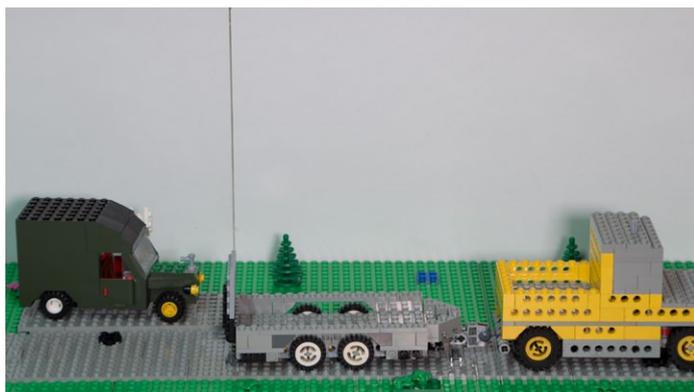
Bertie is the last remaining WW2 Austin 8 NAAFI Van. He once provided refreshments to service personnel on our airfields. Today he is one of the most popular exhibits in the collection of the Russian Arctic Convoy Museum in Aultbea.

On 4th June this year we launched a crowdfunding campaign to help purchase a trailer and waterproof cover for Bertie. We are keen for him to be able to attend local events and to visit schools and care homes. There is also interest in Bertie across the UK from WWII re-enactors, vintage car clubs, and he even fulfilled an important role as wedding car last Autumn. Although Bertie is still happy to be out and about on the road, at 80 years old and with a top speed of 35 mph, some of these requests are simply too far for him to manage on his own. Add into the equation that the British weather is not always co-operative, and this adds a further risk to Bertie's well-being as his cloth roof is vulnerable to damage. The trailer and waterproof cover would solve this and let Bertie travel much further afield to reach wider audiences.

We set an initial target on £5000 and a stretch target of £6000. We are very happy to report that both targets were met and surpassed, and at the close of the campaign on 16th July we had raised £6350. On the 4th August Bertie was selected as a finalist in

the £2500 category by the Calor Rural Community Fund, meaning a panel of judges would decide if he was eligible for a further £2500 on top of what we had already raised. On 19th August it was announced that Bertie was one of the category winners. Coupled with further donations sent in by cheque since the campaign ended, Bertie's total now stands at well over £9000.

This is a fantastic result. The extra funds will all go towards Bertie's maintenance and restoration. We put in a huge effort for this campaign, including filming Bertie out on the road, photo shoots, and even producing a short stop-motion film of a LEGO Bertie driving around Aultbea. It is fantastic to see that our hard work paid off and we are all very excited that Bertie will get his new trailer. We intend to expand our reach throughout the Highlands and Islands and ultimately as far afield as Orkney to visit colleagues working on a similar projects at Scapa Flow and the Outer Hebrides. Of course, with a trailer Bertie will be able to travel throughout the UK should any special requests be made.



A still from our Lego Bertie stop motion

We'd like to thank all our wonderful supporters – everyone who helped by pledging, liking and sharing the campaign. This would not have been possible without you. Obviously we need to say a huge thank you to Calor too for supporting this one-of-a-kind NAAFI Van. The prize money will go a long way towards restoring Bertie.

Bertie brings a smile to everyone's face. He's been handing out tea and treats for 80 years and has no intention of stopping any time soon. We have been busy identifying which trailer would be best for Bertie and have decided that an Ifor Williams GX126 would be ideal. As Ifor Williams closed down for 8 weeks due to Covid there is now an 8 to 10 week delivery lead time. As we see no need for the trailer until next spring when the Museum opens we will leave ordering a new GX126 until later in the year, rather than have it standing out in the elements over the winter. We

will also be purchasing the security devices for the trailer and lashings for the vehicle, as well as making enquiries about obtaining a customised weather proof cover for use by Bertie while in transit on the trailer.



Bertie enjoying the sun in Aultbea

In other news we have recently taken delivery of a refurbished spare wheel and steering wheel, rebuilding 'Bertie' bit by bit!

Keep an eye on our [Facebook page](#) for more Bertie updates.



Chairman's Report

The Museum in 2020

This year's season was very much shorter owing to the Covid pandemic. The museum was able to open on August 12th once safety measures had been put in place to comply with government public health regulations. We thus missed four and a half months of operations, but there was a steady stream of visitors up to the end of October. During this period there were 1,307 visitors compared to 6,055 in 2019. Unfortunately some visitors had to be turned back at times because social distancing rules restricted the number of people allowed in the museum. Income during the short season from admissions and the shop amounted to £9,625 compared to £36,766 in 2019. There has also been a steady flow of donations, which totalled some £6,750 during the season. There will be a small loss for the season, but the project has maintained its sound financial position.

Despite the difficult times interest in the museum project continues to grow both nationally and internationally. Given the on-going Covid situation the outlook for 2021 remains uncertain but we hope to open again in April next year, albeit with some restrictions still in place.

Other developments

We are currently awaiting replies to two grant applications, one to the Covid Resilience Fund and the other for a substantial refurbishment of the museum,

Feature Item: New website content

Arctic Convoy Fiction

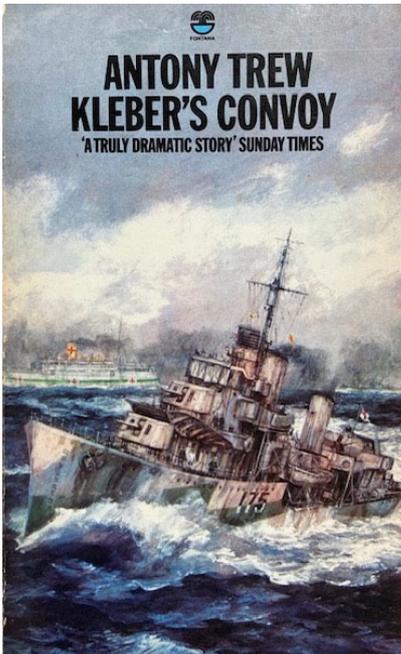
We have created a new section on our website dedicated to the Arctic Convoys in works of fiction. Sometimes novels about wartime exploits prove particularly effective at making readers empathise with the plight and the peril for those that were there for real. By investing us in the main characters and then putting them in danger it somehow makes the actions of ordinary men and women all the more real and remarkable, often drawing an emotional response that straight facts and figures in textbooks don't quite manage.

There are a huge number of fictional accounts of the convoys, some of which were written by men who experienced them first hand. Though these may often be out of print, they can still be found on second-hand bookshops online such as AbeBooks, Oxfam, and eBay.

This section is still quite new, and for now there is only one review of [Kleber's Convoy](#) by Antony Trew, which is well worth reading. However, we have many more books lined up and hope to be able to add more soon, so do keep checking back. We will announce on social media when a new book is added.



A selection of Arctic Convoy fiction titles



Kleber's Convoy, the first of our reviews

We hope you will find the reviews helpful. Often when old, out-of-print fictional accounts of the convoys are listed for sale online there is little to no information about the plot or the author to inform the reader if they would enjoy the read or not. We hope therefore to be able to provide some insight into these often overlooked yet valuable stories.

Convoys Remembered

Over the past 12 months we have added a huge number of veterans to our Convoys Remembered archive. We are delighted that it is inspiring so many submissions of stories and superb images. Personal accounts really help those of us who weren't there to get a sense of what it was like. If your relative served on Arctic Convoys and shared any memories or anecdotes with you, please consider sharing them with us in our archive. It has grown into a wonderful resource for researchers and historians. In some instances we are able to link to scanned war diaries or other media, making it an ever more valuable source of information. Please help us grow it further if you can.

Contact veterans@theracmproject.org to have your relative included.

You can browse the entire archive [here](#).



Leslie Roberts



David Skelton



Gordon Cowley



David Kinloch



Reginald Woodruffe



Dick Burbine



Arthur Capon



Edward Peter Hughes



Richard Fearnside



Geoff Rees



Frank Bealey



Harold Mason



John Arthur Bennett



Norman Parry



Sydney Parcell



William George Riggs



Wilson Mchenry



Samuel Hicks



Denis Sarjeant



Edwin Leadbetter



Bill Llewellyn



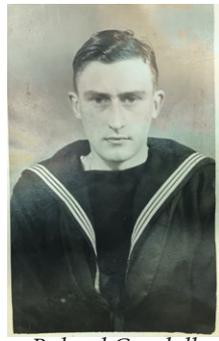
Robert Ackerman



Charles Kennerley



Spud Campbell



Roland Cundall



George Brian White Johnson



Sidney Arthur Kerslake



Frederick Hawkins



William Fitzpatrick



Gordon Wigley



Cyril Jesse Clifford



Clarence Brenchley



Donald Macdermid



Ronald G. Woodard



Frank Moran



Forbes Jamison Aitken



John Cynwyn Hughes

which will include a new roof, external cladding and new lighting, all intended to make the building more environmentally efficient. In the second half 2021 we will be submitting grant applications for the extension to the museum and our architects already have prepared the initial plans for this. The extension would include more exhibition space, a research and education unit and a coffee shop.



These ornate items were donated to RACP by Mr. Ivan Potter, who is a long time friend of one of our Volunteers and have been installed at the EC.

Reader Contributions

Arctic Convoy Veteran Arfan Ullah

This story starts in August 2019 with an e-mail from a locksmith in Cardiff, not the usual source of Arctic Convoy enquiries.

The enquiry was from Sadek in Cardiff who's grandfather Arfan Ulla was killed aboard the PQ12 Arctic convoy merchant ship 'Lancaster Castle' on 14th April 1942 while it was in Murmansk and was attacked by German bomber aircraft.

Arfan was from, what was then the Indian sub-continent, became East Pakistan and then Bangladesh. He was a 'Fireman' working in the engine room of the 'Lancaster Castle'.



Lancaster Castle

Sadek was enquiring whether RACP knew of any survivors of this ship. We had to point out

that any Veterans of that era were now in their mid-90's, and unfortunately we knew of none associated with the 'Lancaster Castle'. However we were able to confirm that his grandfather did in fact have a Commonwealth War Grave in Murmansk, and provide some photos of the grave and details as to

the circumstances of his grandfather's loss.

Following this initial contact with RACP we received further e-mails from two of Sadek's sisters, Shafia & Rajia. Shafia said that her mother had always thought that her father, and her children's grandfather Arfan, had died at sea. She never knew her father as she was born while he was away. Unfortunately she passed away in 2018, but now the family knew there was in fact a grave in Murmansk, and the possibility of being able to visit it.

A report at the time in 1942 by a Mr. Ricks of the ships company stated. "The 'Lancaster Castle' was bombed and sunk whilst anchored in shallow water in Murmansk Roads. The crew attended the funeral of their shipmates who were killed (9) when a 500 lb bomb entered the engine room. The cemetery was on a plateau overlooking the town, and of course the only way there was by sledge. If you can imagine a long line of horse drawn sleighs each carrying a coffin, in a blizzard of snow, we got to the top where a mass grave had been dug. The Service had already started when an Indian Union official, from another ship, indicated the Fireman's bodies were not facing towards Mecca. The coffins were removed, and dynamite used to enlarge the grave site, before being re-interred, and the Service completed."

A subsequent newspaper report stated, "Under the conditions then existing it was a matter of difficulty to make arrangements for the funerals with several nationalities and religions involved, but every care was taken to have the correct funeral rites scrupulously observed."

Rajia commented, "It's amazing how religious and cultural beliefs were taken into account during what must have been an incredibly difficult time." She also identified the village in Bangladesh, Khadim Pur, from where Arfan came from, and had passed back information to there, as there were six other seamen with the surname Ullah lost at the



The grave in Murmansk

same time. Although Ullah was a common name, like Jones or Smith, some might have come from the same village, and all were now known to have graves. Subsequently Rajia advised RACP that 3 of the Ullah's lost did come from this village, and their families were trying to be contacted.

Although the Covid-19 situation prevented Sadek and his sisters making a



visit to Murmansk in 2020. Sadek then met a Russian lady through his locksmith business in Cardiff, who put the family in contact with members of the Muslim community in Murmansk and arrange for a Funeral Prayer (Janaza) to be carried out by the grave side of Arfan recently, and video posted showing this taking place.

JOHN SHANNON



In late 2019 John wrote to the local paper, the Gairloch & District Times, asking whether anyone locally remembered a particular wartime

installation in Poolewe, as he had been stationed here for much of the time.

From this a conversation was started between RACP and John and learnt a lot more about his time here at Loch Ewe and some of what went on here during that time. John was the skipper of one of a group of small boats that used to lead in, and out, the many merchant ships that came here to assemble, and disperse, in/ from convoys destined for Russia. His job was to lead was to check their papers as they approached the loch, and then lead them through the anti-submarine boom to their designated anchorage.

He lived with his wife and young son in a small cottage across the road from Inverewe Gardens, but was often away for weeks. He has passed on many interesting stories about the goings on around the loch during those days, some of 'secret' operations, giving a real insight.

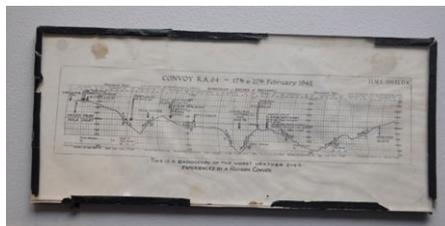
John, now aged 104, lives in a care home in Harrogate, and RACP have visited him on a couple of occasions.

Collection update



Lt. Gavin Hamilton's medals

we received his medals, including our first Distinguished Service Cross (DSC), a mounted copy of



Barograph chart

he had served on at his retirement from the RN in 1959,

and an engraved silver cigarette case. The engraving on this was a thank you from a Norwegian, Gunnar Johnson, who Gavin had assisted in rescuing from Soroy Island off the far north of



Lt. Gavin Hamilton

Norway in 1945. This was the daring rescue of 500 Norwegians by four RN destroyers operating out of Murmansk. Another donation was the diaries of Leonard Chapman, a gunner of the Royal Artillery Maritime Regiment. Men from the army and RN served aboard armed merchant navy ships, referred to as DEMS (Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships), to man the guns against air and U-boat attack. Leonard not only kept very descriptive notes, but also sketches and painting (see photos). Recently we have been able to supply some of this material to the authors of a proposed book.



Sketches from the diary



Left: Eddie Bootes, Right: Leonard Chapman

a barograph reading chart showing an extreme storm during convoy RA64, an engraved silver napkin ring listing all the ships

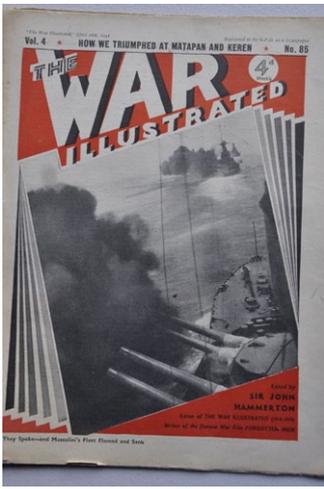


Napkin Ring

listing all the ships he had served on at his retirement from the RN in 1959,

and an engraved silver cigarette case. The engraving on this was a thank you from a Norwegian, Gunnar Johnson, who Gavin had assisted in rescuing from Soroy Island off the far north of Norway in 1945. This was the daring rescue of 500 Norwegians by four RN destroyers operating out of Murmansk.

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Also during the year we received multiple copies of a contemporary newspaper issued during the war called 'The War Illustrated' issued weekly. It covered stories from across all areas of the conflict during WWII, providing an interesting perspective of these events at the time. Those issues that contain articles

on the Arctic convoys have been retained in the RACP Collection for future reference.

Get Involved

How else can I help?

Spread the word. Tell people about our project and help us find more people with stories to share. We are always looking for new stories, accounts and anecdotes to put on the "Convoys Remembered" page of our website, which you can see here: <http://racmp.co.uk/veterans.php>

Volunteer

We welcome any offers of help, particularly from those able to offer the odd afternoon in the summer to man our Exhibition Centre.

If you would like to be involved in our project in any way, no matter how small, please contact Elizabeth Miles at info@theracmproject.org

Donate/loan an item to the collection

Many fascinating items in our collection have been donated by veterans or their relatives. If you have an item relating to the convoys that you think may be of interest to us, then please contact Bruce Hudson at bruce@theracmproject.org

Make a donation

Help us make the project a reality. You can find our Just Giving page here: <https://www.justgiving.com/russianarcticconvoymuseum/Donate/>

or, if you prefer to donate by cheque, please make it out to: "Russian Arctic Convoy Project"

Address:

RACP
C/O Pool House
Poolewe
Wester Ross
IV22 2LD

Don't forget you can gift aid it too.

Follow us online

RACP often post updates, news stories and event details on social networks. If you want to keep up to date with our progress then you can follow us on the following sites:

 [Russian Arctic Convoy Museum](#)

 [Arctic Convoy Museum @InfoRACM](#)

Contact Us

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By email:

info@theracmproject.org

IV22 2LD

Newsletter produced by Nicky Ellakirk (RACP technical advisor) and Natasha Ellakirk (RACP social media marketer).

Photos and articles contributed by Nicky Ellakirk, Natasha Ellakirk, Tom Palmer, Bruce Hudson, Francis Russell, Kyle Mathieson, Sadek, John Shannon, and John Casson.

If you would like to contribute to future newsletters (or find any errors or omissions) please contact us at admin@theracmproject.org

**NEW
DATE**



You are invited to

75TH ANNIVERSARY

**A MEMORIAL MARKING THE END OF
THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC CONVOYS AND WORLD WAR II**

Join us on this momentous occasion to remember the heroism, courage and sacrifice of our brave sailors.

During World War II our brave Royal Navy and Merchant Mariners served on the Russian Arctic convoys sailing from Loch Ewe in Scotland to the Arctic ports of Murmansk and Archangel in northern Russia. They provided Russia with much-needed materials and armaments to help them continue the fight against the Germans on the Eastern Front, providing the Allies with the opportunity to launch D-Day.

If the terrible seas and ice were not threatening the convoys, it was the constant attacks from German aircraft and submarines that were.

In total, 104 Allied merchant ships were sunk with the Arctic convoys, along with 18 warships; 829 merchant mariners and 1,944 navy personnel were killed aboard them. Russia lost 30 merchant ships and an unknown number of personnel.

Sir Winston Churchill, Prime Minister at the time described the Russian Arctic convoys as **'the worst journey in the world'**.



SPECIAL GUEST

Our special guest will be Celia Sandys, granddaughter of Sir Winston Churchill. She will be joined by Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Consuls representing those nations whose nationals served on the Russian Arctic convoys together with representatives from our own armed forces.

DONATION

Should you wish to make a donation in the memory of a Russian Arctic convoy veteran in their name or to support our memorial event, we would welcome that to be made payable to: The Russian Arctic Convoy Project. Please send to Russian Arctic Convoy Museum, Birchburn, Aultbea, Scotland IV22 2HZ, thank you. We are a registered charity and all donations will be acknowledged.

EVENT DETAILS

Date:

Saturday 15th May 2021

Time:

11:00

Location:

Inverasdale by the shores of Loch Ewe, Wester Ross, Scotland. IV22 2LP.

To Book:

Booking is required, visit <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/75th-anniversary-of-russian-arctic-convoys-tickets-89556946237>

Veterans & Carers:

We have funding to cover veterans' transport to Loch Ewe incl. two carers (which can be relatives) and for two night's accommodation. Please contact johncasson@johncasson.com for further details.

After the memorial service, veterans and their carers are invited to join us at a reception.



www.racmp.co.uk



johncasson@johncasson.com



First International Artistic Creativity Competition “TOGETHER WE ARE THE WORLD!”

International Artistic Creative Competition “Together We are the World!” is dedicated to the 80th anniversary of the arrival of the first Allied convoy in the USSR on August 31, 1941.

The aim of the Competition is to implement the ideas of people's diplomacy through creative exchanges between young people and other age groups of Russia and foreign countries to strengthen friendship of them, as well as to form positive image of Russia abroad.

Russian and foreign students of schools, universities and colleges, creative teams and individual performers are invited to take part in the Competition.

Dates of the Competition: from July 1, 2021 to August 1, 2021. Winners will be announced on August 20, 2021 on the website: www.north-convoys.com. Awarding of winners and runners-up in Russia will take place in St. Petersburg on August 31, 2021.

Topics of the Competition: the international cooperation; cooperation of the Soviet Union with other countries during the joint operations of World War II (Lend-Lease, Northern and other Allied convoys); naval operations in the Arctic during World War II; “They forged the Victory” (based on recollections of veterans, their relatives and friends); historical and cultural ties between Russia and abroad in the past and present; friendship of different generations of Russia and other countries.

Competition categories:

“Fine Arts”;

“Photographic Art”;

“Short video film”;

“Decorative and Applied Arts”;

“Literature”: prose, poetry, journalism;

“Music”: instrumental and vocal works;

“Choreography”: staged dance performance;

“Students’ scientific work”.

The questions can be directed to north.convoys.centre@mail.ru

The full version of Competition Terms is available on the website

www.north-convoys.com.



GOOD LUCK!
JUST KEEP YOUR PECKER UP

*Remembrance and all good wishes
for Christmas and the New Year*



*From all at the
Russian Arctic Convoy Project*