

The Voyage of the British Tanker HOPEMOUNT in 1942

Reg Kelso's piece in the last edition about the North West Passage reminded Cachalot Roy Martin of this story of the HOPEMOUNT during WW2. The source is 'Convoys To Russia 1941 - 1945' by Bob Ruegg and Arnold Hague.

The British tanker *HOPEMOUNT* (Common Bros.) was part of the twenty-six ship Arctic convoy PQ 14, which sailed from Oban on 26 March 1942. They left Reykjavik on 8 April. The convoy encountered heavy pack ice and fog, all but eight of the ships turned back. Air and submarine attacks followed and the Commodore's ship *EMPIRE HOWARD* was sunk. The remaining seven reached Murmansk on 19 April, where the *HOPEMOUNT* discharged her cargo of fuel and gas oil.

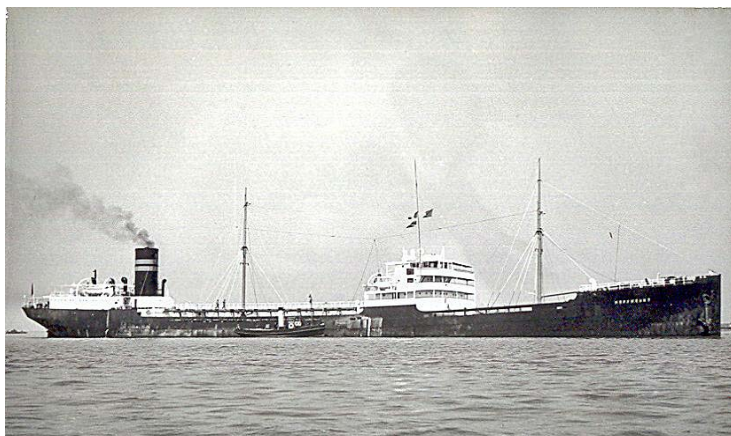
She remained at Murmansk until 29 June, during this time her crew went to action stations on 132 occasions. She was then ordered to support Soviet operations in the White Sea; sailing from Archangel on 29 July, en-route for Port Dickson. Her naval escort turned back at the ice edge, leaving her with only the un-armed icebreaker *LENIN* for company.

The duo joined the '3rd Arctic' convoy that had sailed from Archangel on 8 August. This convoy was made up of eight cargo vessels and two tankers and was escorted by *LENIN*'s sister-ship *KRASIN*: both icebreakers had been built by Armstrong Whitworth in 1917. The 3rd Arctic passed Port Dickson 16-18 August, making about five knots in the ice.

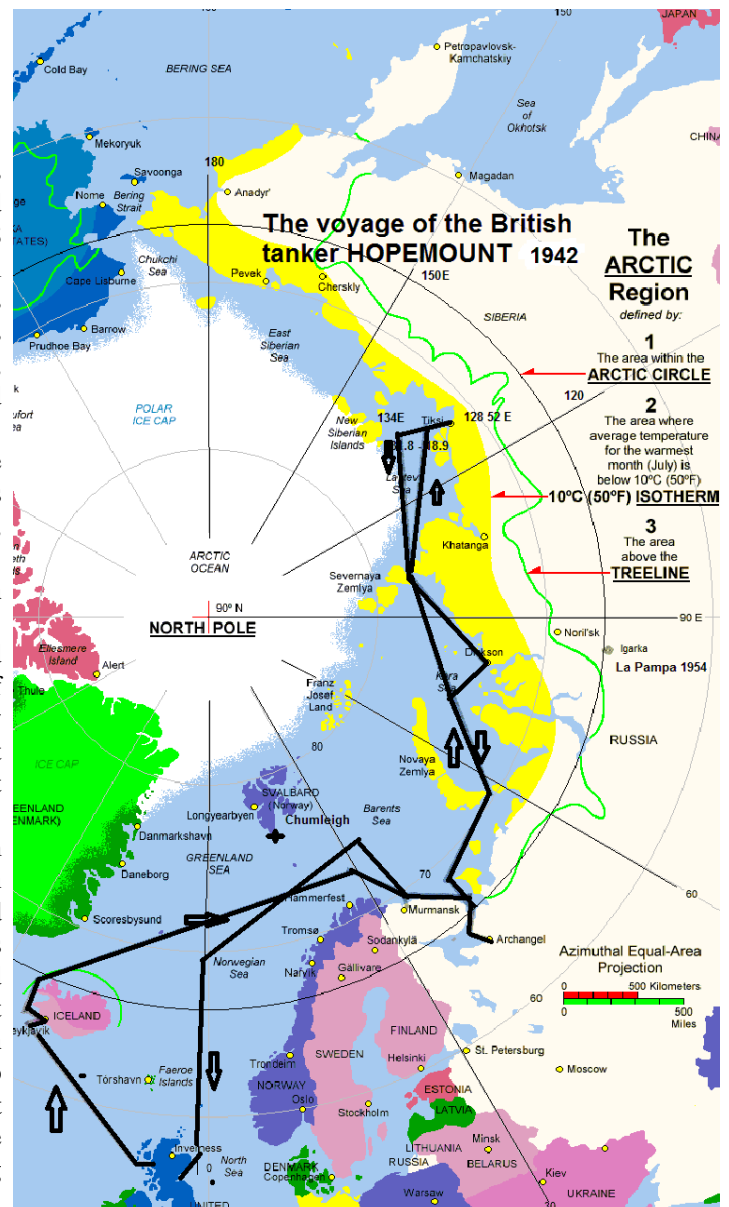
On 21 August the convoy was located by an aircraft from the heavy cruiser *ADMIRAL SCHEER*, part of Operation Wunderland. The aircraft reported that the convoy consisted of 'nine transports and a two funnelled ice breaker', so this encounter may have been before *HOPEMOUNT* joined the 3rd Arctic. Fortunately for the convoy the aircraft reported that the east bound convoy was 'heading South West'. This would have taken them to the heavy cruiser, who decided to sit and wait for the prey to arrive. This error almost certainly saved the convoy. The spotter plane made one further flight, before wrecking herself on landing by hitting an ice floe.

On reaching Tiksi on 31 August, *HOPEMOUNT* topped up her cargo with 3,000 tons of fuel oil and badly needed fresh water – which turned out to be brackish. She sailed from Tiksi, 134 E, on 18th August, having refuelled three Russian destroyers from Vladivostok on the 16th and started the return trip. *HOPEMOUNT* re-joined the 3rd Arctic convoy, which had turned back because of heavy ice. By this time the British crew were subsisting on dried peas, flour, corned beef and tea, the galley was able to make flapjacks, but not bread.

HOPEMOUNT got to Yugorski Shar on 11 October, there she remained until three British minesweepers arrived to clear a channel. The naval vessels again left leaving icebreakers to escort the *HOPEMOUNT*, by now with a damaged propeller, to Iokanka: from where the minesweepers collected her on 29th November. *HOPEMOUNT* fuelled the minesweepers and they provided her with drinking water. A doctor from HMS *HARRIER* found that the whole crew were suffering from scurvy.



Common Bros Tanker Hopemount



According to Ruegg and Hague 'the Master wrote a very low key report', saying 'All.... behaved extremely well, but nobody was outstanding- it was a case of all pulling together'. However another report, which cannot be verified, says that the Chief Officer took command for part of the voyage.

The writers first ship, LA PAMPA, loaded lumber in Igarka 87 E in August 1954, possibly a peacetime record? We cadets were paid off before this trip, as our cabin was needed for the two Russian pilots.