

Oh my goodness, this is freezing! When I joined this merchant ship last week, March 14<sup>th</sup> 1944 to be precise, in Loch Ewe, it was a bit chilly but just a Scottish winter day. But now that we have crossed into the Arctic, all the machines and tanks on deck are covered with thick ice. They look like huge animals. I wonder how my horse is without me. ... The sailors right now are chipping the ice off lest the ship turns turtle. ... Winston said that this is the worst journey in the world. He might be right.

I wonder if my father knew what this would be like. Perhaps he thought it would take my mind off David – we could have got married. ... Is this really the only way to get to Moscow? I know the Germans are all over Europe now so we can't cross it like we used to. I have no address for the British embassy in Moscow. I've no idea how long this job will last - I suppose it depends on how friendly the Russians are to us and unfriendly they are to the Germans. And when I get there, what work do they want me to do? I know the Ministry of Information enrolled me in night school Russian classes but I'm not much good yet. If they want me to be a secretary they'll soon discover how slow my typing is.

The two girls sharing the cabin with me are very quiet and serious – I wonder if they too will be working in the embassy. They really come to life when we go iceberg-spotting up on the bridge and shout warnings to the sailors to change tack. The food on board is luxurious, much better than the rations at home. If we do get hungry I have six tins of Fray Bentos bully beef in my trunk, though it is intended for bribes.

Yesterday the waves were huge and I actually wore my Mae West, even though the Captain told us that there was little point in life-jackets. If the ship sinks, we'll die of cold anyway. The thing is that the holds are full of ammunition for the Russians, so the ship would explode given half a chance. There were two frightening moments yesterday when depth charges were dropped on marauding submarines. The noise was terrifying. Our ship was shaken as if it was a bit of tin, like Ashley's matchbox toy boat. But we got used to the underwater explosions and finished off five German submarines. When we were parallel to the north coast of Norway, we heard on the wireless that the *Tirpits*, which was ready to pounce on the convoy, had been bombed in a fiord. This was a great relief.

No one on board is allowed to keep a diary – the Official Secrets Act ... I'm not sure this is a diary. I've drawn a map to get the hang of where we are going. Miss James would not be impressed! We're either going to dock in Murmansk or go through the White Sea, which is frozen, to Archangel. The Captain told me that a Russian ice-breaker will cut through the ice in front of us. Imagine that.

I wonder how you unload all that ammunition and those tanks onto the ice. And what about my trunks? I suppose sledges are used. Will they be horse-drawn? I'll be homesick for my horse. ... Then us. How do we disembark onto ice? I suppose there will just be us three girls on the train to Moscow. 750 miles is a long way.

**Lavinia Ponsonby**

**Susie Reade**