

# Edinburgh man's secret diaries reveal the hell of the Arctic Convoy

Recently discovered secret diaries kept by Leonard H Thomas have been transcribed and published by his daughter Leona Thomas.

Leonard kept them while on the Russian Arctic Convoys in 1942 when he was on four convoys to and from Murmansk and Archangel. The latter was PQ18 which followed PQ17 – the convoy decimated by enemy action in July 1942.

Over the previous ten years Leonard had previously sailed on RRS Discovery II to Antarctica having joined as a 17 year-old lad from his home town of Portsmouth. While on these voyages he kept copies notes, sketches and diaries and so, when war broke out and he joined up and was posted to HMS Ulster Queen, it seemed natural for him to continue his writings. Should any of his writing be discovered he would be in serious trouble and so he wrote in abbreviated form and secreted them well.

After the War he married and moved to Edinburgh in 1949 and joined James Howden Ltd, installing the heavy turbines in electrical power stations including those at Portobello, Longannet and Cockenzie.

After he retired, he began writing his memoirs starting with his early memories of Portsmouth, where he was born in 1912 and then describing his Antarctic years and later, the War years. Leonard died in 2000 at the age of 88.

Since her own retirement, Leona, has started going through the copious amounts of Leonard's writings and memorabilia. Discovering he had been on the Russian Arctic Convoys, she began her own research and in due course became part of the

team who took 40 Arctic Convoy veterans and their families to Loch Ewe in 2013 where they received their Arctic Star medals. She has also embroidered a panel for the Scottish Diaspora Tapestry commemorating the links with the convoys and NW Scotland.

Inspired by meeting the veterans, Leona began to transcribe and edit the writings of her father and these are due to be published in a book entitled 'Through Ice and Fire'. It tells of how the men, having survived the treacherous journey under fire and in intense cold, then suffered from appalling food shortages under the stark conditions they met in on the freezing, unforgiving and unknown shores of Archangel. Once berthed there they faced the approaching winter and being trapped in the port where they endured the frosty Russian attitudes towards the British Navy. It illustrates the fortitude and bravery of the men who sailed on the convoys to Russia – as Churchill called it – 'the worst journey in the world.'

'Through Ice and Fire: A Russian Arctic Convoy Diary 1942'

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Submitted by [Leona Thomas](#)

