

Eddy Gilmore Reports:

War Convoy Trip to Arctic Circle Led to 11-Year Stay in Russ 'Jail Without Bars'

EDITORS NOTE - The business of reporting is to tell what happens to other people, not themselves. But occasionally the reporters themselves get into the news, and the "story behind the story" becomes of interest. That's the case with Eddy Gilmore, AP correspondent, who, in a sense, became an prisoner of the cold war. He spent 11 years in Moscow, and not all of it by choice. In other articles he has written of some of the events he observed in the Soviet Union, and of his impressions. For this article Gilmore was asked to tell his own, personal story—especially how he maintained his good humor through several years of uncertainty.)

By EDDY GILMORE

PARIS (AP) - Getting into Russia can sometimes be more difficult than getting out of Russia. Both were difficult in my case.

Russia was far from my thoughts that June morning in bomb-blasted Chelsea, London, where I was living in 1941. The telephone beside the bed began that English double-ring, and it was the Russian voice of an emigre Russian girl that told me of the German invasion of the Soviet Union.

"Hitler's soobmorines," she said in that curious, melodious voice that I was to hear so many times later in the U.S.S.R., "ess drobnik topaydos all ovah leetle mudda Rooshia."

Effective Red Accent

(I always thought she affected this accent, but affected or not, it was effective.)

This was all very hard to tune in at 6 a.m., British double daylight time.

"What are you doing," I asked, "drinking vodka at this hour of the night?"

After quite a few more questions I realized Hitler had at last marched against Stalin. In no time at all the Associated Press ordered me to the Soviet Union. But how to get there? A convoy, I was told in a hushed voice, was the only way.

Never Heard of Me

I taxied to the Soviet embassy confident they would be delighted to hand me a visa to go help report the Russian war effort to the outside world. How extremely wrong I was. They never heard of me. They said the visa would take time.

It did, too, but early in October we were sailing the Arctic Ocean, above the Arctic Circle, in a British convoy for Archangel. What wretched words those were for me . . . Arctic Circle, Archangel.

Every day German planes would come out and look at us and we would look back and pray they would do no more than look. That's all they did do. We were loaded with tanks and hurricane planes. The Russian front was falling apart and military experts all over the world were predicting the Germans would occupy Moscow in weeks. The Soviet capital, we learned, was already being evacuated.

A grim outlook, and made dimmer by events in Archangel. The Russian authorities there had never heard of us (five correspondents, three American, one English and one Australian, with two RAF officers.) They wouldn't even let us off the boat. Then one morning I saw a smartly dressed RAF officer walking along the quay, looking up at the ship.

"Good morning," he said brightly, and those words never sounded nicer.

Allowed Off Ship

The officer turned out to be group captain, later Air Commodore Ivoe Bird, and later to die in Moscow. We told him our plight and he began to "deal with it," as the British say. In a few hours we were at least allowed off the ship, a doughty little merchantman on which we'd been confined 27 days.

We crossed the Dvina, already freezing, in a small boat and spent the day trying to find a Russian with authority to let us go to Moscow. Disillusioned, we started back across the Dvina to our ship. We used an Archangel ferry for this ride through the ice and it brought me in close contact with Russians in mass for the first time.

Disregard for Ice Floes

The pilot of the wood-burning ferry showed utter disregard for the big ice blocks. When the ferry would get halted by them, he would throw her into reverse, and then charge the blocks, the entire craft quivering. Again and again. After an hour of this we reached solid ice, 75 yards from the river bank. The ferry could go no farther.

The 200 Russians on the ferry began to pour over the sides, down a sort of ladder. I noticed that the first one was a cripple. He reached the ice and started out on his crutches.

He took three paces and then, whoops! His crutches shot out from under him and he fell on the ice. Roar after roar of laughter swept the 200 Russians. The cripple got up and grinned.

So Beautifully Cruel

"That's very Oriental," said one of the RAF officers, "and never forget this. The Russians are cruel people. But so beautifully cruel."

After six days in Archangel word got through from Moscow to let us come to Moscow. Off we went to the railway station in a snowstorm. Never mind. We were on our way. We thought everything was fine, but at the railway station we discovered that while the Moscow train

was standing by, we had no tickets and no permission to buy them (the first, but not the last time I was to hear that).

But there was a helpful British colonel, also bound for Moscow. Col. Hulls of the Gordon Highlanders. He got us aboard. The fact he spoke Russian helped.

The trip took 21 days. We went into Siberia, and back out again. We were on the train and off. There was the shabby hotel in the ancient city of Yaroslavl.

Weighted With Books

"Where is it?" I asked the Russian expert among us, a man who weighted himself down with books on Russia, and weighted us down with his opinions.

"Where is what?" he countered. "The men's room," I told him. He looked at me with heavy disdain, and spoke slowly:

"Gilmore, you are in a country of Communism. There is full equality of the sexes. These people are not filled with false modesty as are we of the Western World. There's one such room, shared by men and women alike, and why shouldn't it be this way?"

"All right," I said, "but where is it?"

He told me. I discovered I was the only person there. Then I heard the voices of several women. I listened hard for a male voice.

More Women Came

I stayed there for quite a while just listening. Not only did these women not go away, more came. I felt I'd better go. So, gathering my courage, I put my hand against a door and resolutely shoved it open. It hit something and from the angled wall that went up I knew I'd hit a baby. But it was too late to stop now.

I found myself in a huddle of shouting women and one screaming child. I beat a hasty retreat

up the corridor to the room where Hulls, his face grave, summoned me into the corridor.

"Gilmore," he said, "what have you been doing in the ladies room? The management has had a strong complaint."

From that day on I've never placed much faith in experts on Russia.

Bitterly Cold Trip

Full of self pity, we thought this trip was the worst in the world. It was bitterly cold. Several windows in our car had been blown out by German bombs. They were replaced by carboard. We were re-angel with food for six days and that had gone. We had a little money, but the peasants at the wayside weren't interested in money—the, wanted soap, salt and clothes.

Everything except my razor, a bar of soap, some money and the clothes I stood in had been stolen on the train. The same thing had happened to Larry LeSueur, of the Columbia Broadcasting System.

Col. Hulls had slipped on the ice while foraging for food at a wayside station and broken his arm. I'd lost about 14 pounds. We looked and felt a collective mess in this land of collectivity.

Chunk of Paradise

Kuibyshev, on the high east bank of the frozen Volga, seemed a lovely chunk of paradise as we arrived in a snowstorm. We had expected a great welcome. A single Greek made up the welcoming committee.

But pretty soon, John Russell, secretary the British embassy showed up and helped us find our way to the Grand Hotel which, until this day, has made me wary of hotels by that name.

A few days later, sitting in a room of the building to which the American embassy had been evacuated from Moscow, we heard about Pearl Harbor, and then we listened

to Hitler over the shortwave radio, declare war on the United States.

600 Miles From Story

We were 600 miles from one of the greatest stories in the world. And couldn't get there and couldn't get anyone interested in our getting here. Telegrams took two days to get to New York from Kuibyshev. The world looked dark indeed.

And then the Russians put up that defense at Moscow's gates. German patrols were actually 14 miles from the city at one point.

Marshal Georgi Zhukov flung the Germans back from Moscow and our luck changed too. We were hurried to Moscow. I say hurried; it took six days by train.

Red Square had always meant Moscow to me, and arriving there in the blackout, I deposited my belongings (American Embassy friends in Kuibyshev had given me some clothes) and set out from the Metropole Hotel to walk in Red Square.

There it was—just as big as I'd imagined and just as mysterious looking. It was full moonlight and I truly felt in another world—as I looked up at the onion-shaped and many colored domes of St. Basil's Cathedral. At that block of marble was Lenin's tomb and where I was later to see them lay the body of Joseph Stalin. And the Kremlin, the ancient Kremlin of Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great the Alexanders and Lenin and Stalin.

Mother Metropole

In due course, I was able to take up residence at the Metropole Hotel. Ah, Mother Metropole. And Mother Metropole's great dining room—now used for an occasional dance—where I first met Tamara, the brown-eyed Russian girl who was to become my wife. And, if you'll pardon me a little sentiment,

the person who has made me feel that if life ended tomorrow, life wouldn't owe me a thing.

She was a dancer in the Moscow Ballet, and we were married in 1943 with the late Wendell Wilkie playing the role of intermediary and benefactor.

Just after the war, in the summer of 1946, Tamara and I visited the United States. We took along our elder daughter Vicki, then 2, and returned to Moscow after a 3-month vacation, fairly sure that if we got out once we'd get out again. The office said I was the man for the job—and Russia was a fascinating place.

Back to Russia Again

It was in September, 1946, that I went back to resume the job of reporting Russia. Then the roof began to fall in. It was about the time of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. When the Kremlin—and this means Stalin—began to realize that there was a growing number of people in the world who didn't look on him exactly as benign old Uncle Joe.

The Russian government ruled that Russian girls who had married foreigners—and there were many others—could not leave the country. As an American citizen, I could leave any time, but not with my wife and two girls.

It was a case of sticking with them in Moscow, or abandoning them. The latter was too monstrous to even think about. I stuck with them. And Tamara stuck with me in times when it was anything but pleasant to be the Russian wife of an American in Moscow.

The censorship became rigid. I once tried to write a story about Russian dishes. Half of it was killed. In a museum I found a copy of one of Stalin's schoolboy report cards. Like many other youths he wasn't too hot in Greek and arithmetic. I wrote about that. The censor killed it. Stalin had to be perfect, even as a 10-year-old.

I began to write almost exclusively for one of the smallest circles of readers in the world—those censors. But occasionally I'd get something out, or a piece of visual reporting would come along that I could let go on. But every month held a hundred heartbreaks.

The Gilmore family became a casualty of the cold war.

Everything Uncertain

The worst thing for me was the

uncertainty of everything. I had no diplomatic passport. No diplomatic immunity. I could be slapped into jail on any accusation and I knew there was probably nothing anyone could do about it.

The credit of the organization for which I work, they stuck by me. I was in a pickle, but I knew the AP knew, that as long as rigid censorship prevailed in Russia, the most high-powered correspondent alive couldn't get much high-powered stuff out of Russia.

I found a formula for not going crazy:

I became a drummer in a jazz band, the best American drummer in all Russia, and Russia occupies one-sixth of the earth's surface. You see, I was the only American drummer in Russia.

We called the band the "Kremlin Krows," until the chief of protocol of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs saw it painted on my bass drum one night at the Egyptian legation.

He said it showed disrespect for the Kremlin.

"The Purged Pigeons"

We had to wash the name off the bass drum. Then we called ourselves "The Purged Pigeons." But it took too much time explaining that.

The last and final name we played under was "Joe Commode and his Four Flushers."

Foreigners never could figure that one out. And they didn't want to ask. It saved an awful lot of trouble.

The band's personnel changed from year to year. But not the drummer boy. He just got balder and fatter. And it looked as if he were not only the best American drummer in all Russia, but a permanent one.

I believe that band saved me. That and Tamara. And the sure knowledge that in Russia anything can happen and frequently does.

Permitted to Leave

Then one day the lightning struck. With Stalin dead, the new Soviet regime decided to let us go, along with some others similarly situated.

I know now what it means when the warden comes in and says: "Get your things ready, son."

To let us go was no great and original act of charity. It was something that should have been done a long time ago. But we are thank-

ful anyway. And pinching ourselves. I've wanted a camera for years, but it would have been rather dangerous for an American correspondent to have one in Moscow. This month I was in Sweden watching people snap cameras all around me.

"My God," I said to myself one morning, "why don't I go out and buy one?"

It simply hadn't occurred to me that I could.

How truly superb it is to get where you want to, say what you want to, live the way you want to and in my business—to write with out censorship!

PENNY PINCHER

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