

ELENA IN SYDNEY IN 1825

In the first half of 1820-ties navigation between the European Russia and Russian America encountered serious problems. In 1821 the ship *Elizaveta* purchase of which had cost the Russian-American Company 30,000 roubles and loading - 70,000 roubles failed to sail further than the Cape of Good Hope due to numerous breakages. By early 1823 it had become clear that maintaining of the existing system of supply of Russian America would quickly lead the company to a financial collapse. In 1823 it was decided to send the ship *Elena* with 361 tones of state-owned cargo of rice to Okhotsk and Petropavlovsk.

Whilst "Elena" was preparing to sail off from Kronshtadt the governments of the Great Britain and America kept protesting against the imperial pretensions of the Tsar's government on the north-western coast of North America. The pressure was also exerted on the Russian settlements in this region what was twice reported to the capital by the Governor of the colony M.I. Muraviev. In the meantime the Russian settlers in Alaska were undergoing growing difficulties with supply of food previously dispatched from America. Captain-lieutenant Chistiakov, a future Governor of the Russian America, previously navigated to the most remote Russian colonies in the rank of second lieutenant on the RAC ship *Borodino* commanded by captain-lieutenant Ponafidin. He left the North-American colonies only in 1821. Having suffered hardships of tropical navigation hazardous of fever he highly appraised a similar experience of his young lieutenants and invited to this voyage Nikolay Shishmarev who had previously visited Australia as the captain of the sloop *Blagonamerennyi* in 1819-20. Zakhar Blank was appointed as the first lieutenant of *Elena*, Dmitrii Yakovlev (who later served on *Kutuzov*) - as shturman (navigator).

Preparation to the navigation took several months and at last on the 12th August 1824 "Elena" sailed off with the half empty hold. Having called in Portsmouth (England) and Rio-de-Janeiro the sailors of "Elena" saw the Tasmanian shore on the 25th of August 1825. The ship arrived in Sydney nine days after. Upon the arrival Chistiakov visited the Governor of the colony Sir Thomas Brisbane. Prominent citizens of the city and government officials offered the Russian captain their hospitality - it was a tradition worked out during the previous Russian naval visits. Of course, the Russians answered with their own hospitality. They held a magnificent ball and dinner attended by the elite of Sydney. This performance was reported by a correspondent of the *Sydney Gazette*:

Our port has been greatly enlivened by the splendid entertainments given by Captain Chistakov and his officers... On one of these occasions it was gratifying to observe the neatness with which the ship was decorated, and the attention paid to our Sovereign. The visitors were called upon deck and a bumper toast, in champagne, requested by our good-hearted toast, when a curtain dropped, and a transparency with the letters, 'Alexander the First' displayed itself on the mizzenmast; and opposite, on the mainmast another with the letters, 'G Rex the Fourth' and the health of two of the greatest Monarchs in Europe was drunk with four times four, the whole of the crew cheering, and the boatswains pipe whistling. Fireworks succeeded, and the 'merry dance' continued to an early hour in the morning, which was only interrupted for a while by the company partaking of a most elegant supper when many loyal toasts were given. At the last dance given on board of the Helena, we have scarcely witnessed greater or more fascinating display of Ladies, who were all highly delighted with their marine visit.

The visit differed from the previous ones by its small scientific significance: *Elena* had come to Sydney to repair the ship and to give the crew a rest what was the aim of Chistyakov who did not intend to reach Sitkha earlier than the middle of the Northern summer. The Russian ship stayed in Sydney for nearly 50 days. On the 24th of May "Elena" weighed the anchor, and, having checked up the chronometers on the Norfolk Island, came to Novo-Archangel in the middle of July. Chistiakov stayed in Sitkha having occupied the position of the Governor of the Russian America but not a single word was published about it in St Petersburg. The Tsar Nikolay II who had recently ascended the throne under dramatic circumstances had sympathy neither to the officer corps of the Russian ships navigating the Pacific waters nor to the servicemen of the RAC. Indeed,

amongst them there were the Decembrists K.P. Torson (*Vostok*), D.I. Zavalishin (*Kreiser*), M.K. Kuhelbekker (*Appolon*), V.P. Romanov (*Otkrytie*), K.F. Ryleev (RAC). The Tsar's court noticed that the Pacific navigations with calls in the British seaports and colonies bred liberals and the consequences of these navigation jeopardize the well-being of the monarchy.

Due to the fact that a bank loan had to be taken to equip the expedition the expenditures on it finally made up half a million silver roubles. This itself signaled that the era of frequent Russian naval visits to Australia was due to end.

G. Barrat. The Russians and Australia. Vancouver. 1988

A. Evans. A Navy for Australia. 1986