

THE RUSSIAN SEAMEN IN BRISBANE

The *Nayezdnik* clipper in the capital of Queensland in 1888



In the second half of XIX - beginning of the XX century the Russian naval ships visited along with Sydney and Melbourne other quickly growing seaports of Australia. The Naval Ministry in St-Petersburg compiled geographical descriptions of seaports of Australia, New Zealand and other Pacific countries on the basis of reports of the Russian seamen. That was the reason for a visit of the *Nayezdnik* clipper to Brisbane in December 1888.

Visits to Australia always were the most interesting stage of international navigation for Russian naval officers. It was known little about this country in Russia, and its rapid economic development, achievements in building of a democratic political system had to attract special attention. Detailed and objective descriptions of Australia may be found in trip diaries, notes and memoirs of the Russian seamen, in official reports of ship captains. Largely it was the sailors' writings what created in Russia an image of a "happy country" of Australia and social laboratory of the humankind.

In the whole second half of the XIX century the Australians related to Russia in general and to the Russian seamen in particular rather with constrain. A freight before a Russian landing in the event of a war between Russia and England deeply rooted in conditions of a strain in Anglo-Russian relations. The freight before a Russian invasion was ungrounded, but sometimes it was taking a form of real Russophobia, which was frequently accompanied by loud anti-Russian campaigns in press.

Fortification rushes were taking place during periods of the strongest heat-ups in Anglo-Russian relations. Such companies had not missed out Queensland. This colony due to its geographical location was supposed to become the first victim of a Russian aggression. During a military drill in 1878 (period of the Russo-Turkish war) plans of land-mining around Brisbane were worked

out and in two 64-pound gun were installed in Townsville. In 1885 during a collision between the Russian and British interests in Central Asia an urgent draft of reservists to beat off an expected on a daily basis Russian landing began in Brisbane.

The anti-Russian fallacies were softening during direct contacts between Australians and members of crews of Russian ships visiting the seaports of the fifth continent. The people of Queensland saw the Russian seamen only in 1888 - much later than people of other Eastern states - New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania.

The *Nayezdnik* clipper was built at the "Novoye Admiralteistvo" wharf in St-Petersburg in September 1878. Initially it was included into the Pacific squadron and, as well as almost all the ships of this squadron, was used for naval practice by graduates of the Russian naval cadet corps. In October 1888 she was withdrawn from the squadron and sent to Kronshtadt. It was a one-chimney steam ship with a 1.719 h. p. engine and displacement of 1499t. Its length was 69.2m, width - 10m, immersion - 4.4m. The ship's cruise speed was up to 13.5 mph. She was armed with three 152-mm guns and 10 guns of smaller calibers. Her crew consisted of 17 officers and 178 low ranks.

The visit to Australia took place during a return navigation of *Nayezdnik* from the Far East seas to Russia. The route of navigation had been coordinated by the commander of the Russian Pacific Squadron V.P. Schmidt and the naval Ministry in St-Petersburg and went from Nagasaki via Sydney, the Cape of Montevideo and Azores Islands.

The commander of the clipper Serguey Appolinariyevich Zarin decided to call in Brisbane as well. "(I) visited Brisbane, - he wrote in his report to the Naval Ministry on the 27th of December 1888, - because of an interest to it as to a new and quickly developing city; decided as useful to show the Russian flag". Zarin, unlike the majority of other Russian captains, never left a detailed description either of Brisbane or any other Australian ports in which *Nayezdnik* had called. This captain didn't like to write reports at all, and his reports on the navigation of *Nayezdnik* were extremely dry and short. Later on this shortness caused dissatisfaction of the Russian Navy commander and Navy Minister, general-admiral Great Duke Alexey Alexandrovich (a brother of the Tsar Alexander III), and Zarin was reprimanded.

Before her call in Brisbane *Nayezdnik* visited the Thursday Island near the Queensland coast where she stayed for two days and bunkered coal. Then she slowly sailed southwards by the Eastern coast of Australia frequently stopping for implementation of hydrological measurements: apart from a task of familiarization with seaports poorly known by the Russian seamen the clipper was to work out a navigation map of the Eastern shores of the fifth continent. On the 8th of December the ship crossed the traverse of Cooktown and from the 10th to 12th of December stayed in Townsville where it bunkered again. On the 16th of December she arrived in Brisbane.

She stayed in Brisbane for 4 days. The clipper was open for visitors, the officers of the ship as one of the local papers wrote "were exclusively polite and hospitable". The public on the deck was entertained with cognac and smoked sausages. On the 18th of December the captain Zarin arranged a breakfast onboard for the administration representatives of Brisbane and its beau monde. In a reply the Minister of Justice [A.J. Thynne](#) who was present at the breakfast invited the Russian guests for a country trip. A special train was allocated for it, and on the 19th of December the clipper captain with a group of officers headed inland. The trip had lasted till the 20th of December. The Russians visited the towns of Toowoomba and Warwick.

The press of Queensland wrote about the visit of the Russian seamen in detail. All publications were kept in a tone amicable to the Russians, although the *Evening Observer* newspaper wrote the following: "Some Brisbane people consider the Russians should not have been let into "the know" as to what the country is like" in Australia. No doubt, the paper reflected real attitude of some people of Queensland.

Upon the returning from Toowoomba and Warwick S.A. Zarin paid the prime-minister of Queensland [B.D. Morehead](#) a visit and then thanked the colonial authorities for their heartily attitude towards the clipper crew. Indeed, the officers of *Nayezdnik* were so deeply touched by the warm welcome that Zarin even pointed it out in his laconic report to the Naval Ministry.

The visit was marred by defection of a 2nd class sailor E. Kuznetsov which had not returned from a vacation and stayed on shore. Those things had been happening very often during stays of Russian ships in foreign ports. Zarin himself melancholically advised it in his report having added that he counted it necessary to inform the police of Brisbane and the Russian consul in Sydney about it.

On the 20th of December the citizens of Brisbane fare welled *Nayezdnik*. The farewell ceremony and level of its conduct were far beyond a common protocol and was characterized by an emphasized sympathy to the Russians. A delegation led by A. J. Thynne came onboard, said good bye to the crew and wished her a happy way. During passing of *Nayezdnik* by the Australian gunboats *Palooma* and *Gayunda* they half-downed their aft flags as a sign of greeting. The same was done by the Russian clipper. A long route across the pacific and Atlantic lay ahead the Russian sailors.

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A Russian Warship The Najezelnik in Brisbane, - Evening Observer. December 17, December 21, 1888