



The Soviet research vessel Gissar leaves Anchorage Friday.

Anchorage Daily News/Bill Roth



A few well-wishers wave from the dock as the Soviet vessel leaves Anchorage.

Anchorage Daily News/Bill Roth

Visitors welcome

Soviets, Americans meet aboard research vessel docked here

By KIM RICH
Daily News reporter

Stanislav Kass looked out his window early this week and saw something that, he said, gave him a start: a Soviet flag flapping in the breeze at the Port of Anchorage.

"I thought, 'Russian invasion! What the heck is going on in this beautiful city?'" Kass said. "Of course I'm joking."

Kass and his family immigrated to the United States from the Soviet Union in 1978.

The Soviet research vessel Gissar docked in Anchorage Wednesday and left Friday morning. It came for water, fuel, provisions and a crew

change, said Tyler Jones, director for the Port of Anchorage.

Thursday the ship held an open house.

Kass visited the ship. On board, he was in hot demand because he spoke Russian. Few of the American visitors did. Even fewer of the ship's sailors spoke English.

Visitors were greeted by smiling young Soviet sailors who motioned for them to sign a guest book. Then groups of visitors were led off by individual sailors. Upon leaving, visitors were asked to sign another book and offer comments about their visit.

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"We had a lot of people come and say they felt really welcomed," said Jones. "It was a really charmed (port) call."

The 333-foot stern trawler is conducting plankton research in the Bering Sea, Jones said, adding that while about a half-dozen ships from Soviet Bloc countries dock here each year, it is rare to have a Soviet vessel in port.

Even in his homeland, Kass had never been on a government ship. He was not sure he'd be welcomed on this one.

"I think they think I'm no good," he said. "But they don't care. They're nice guys."

Kass boarded the ship dressed in a leather jacket. Underneath, he wore a bright yellow sweater and around his neck hung a gold pendant.

Kass broke the ice by jokingly asking the sailors, in perfect Russian, where they "slept with the ladies."

"They looked shocked. Then they asked me where did I learn to speak Russian so good." He told them.

"They asked me how I get here and how I liked it. . . I told them America been very good to me. . . I told them we make a couple million dollars

a year. . . I was kidding." But others were not having as much conversational luck. On the ship's bridge, one American visitor kept trying to talk to his Russian guide about the vessel's navigational instruments.

Finally, the American pointed to one piece of equipment and said, "RADAR."

The Soviet sailor smiled broadly and nodded his head. Moments later, the same American pointed to a volleyball net strung across the ship's rear deck.

"VOLLEYBALL," he said. Again, his Soviet guide smiled and nodded.

Visitors were led down into the vessel's lower decks where they were guided through a maze of narrow hallways. Many of the walls were hung with plastic covered bulletin boards filled with pictures and narration extolling Soviet culture and news events, like one showing women playing soccer.

Kass said such items are commonly found in Soviet workplaces.

Around a corner was the crew's mess hall. The brightly lit room was hung with photos of the crew, a chart mapping the progress of a Soviet hockey team, and a portrait of Lenin.

The sailors directed their

guests to tables where white metal tea pots sat next to large, shallow bowls heaped high with coarse sugar. Metal plates were filled with freshly made bread, butter and cheese.

A slim, red-haired woman stood near the kitchen, smiling and nodding at the guests.

"She hovered near my kids, and my kids gave her big hugs," said Elsenia Horton, who toured the ship with her husband, Garry, and the couple's two children.

"My kids ate up tons of bread and cheese. They loved the hospitality," she said. "One seaman gave them some Soviet money. And around every corner they kept handing them candy. I know Russians love children."

Later on the tour, Elsenia Horton stood near a room stacked with potatoes.

"Are those Russian potatoes?" she asked.

Some were. Others were in boxes marked "California Russet."

Down another hall, Horton's tour guide invited everyone into his cabin. Inside, he switched on a small portable TV set in time to view an ad for A&W Root Beer.

"Is that Russian TV?" asked one visitor, before quickly realizing that it was not.

Several pictures from a National Geographic magazine hung on the cabin's walls. One was an ad for Dodge Ram trucks.

Back out in the corridor, the Hortons and their guide discussed Soviet medicine.

"We think Russians would love our life here, but I don't always think so," Elsenia Horton said later. "They are taken care of from the cradle to the grave."

Later, she described the two hours she had spent on the ship. "It was like being in Russia. It was like being in a different world."

As the sun began to dip in the cloudless sky, Barbara Johnson stood in a parking lot near the Gissar. She had just finished a tour. As she looked back at the ship, several F-15 fighter jets circled overhead on their landing approach to Elmendorf Air Force Base.

"I really felt like it was an opportunity of a lifetime," she said. "I kept trying to tell them how much I appreciated their hospitality but nobody understood me."

"We don't agree with their politics and vice versa, but they are people just like us and it's really important to meet them and shake their hands."

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Soviet visitor

The Soviet research vessel Gissar lies in the Port of Anchorage Thursday afternoon. The ship docked Wednesday to take on supplies, and was due to sail today.

Anchorage Daily News/Michael Penn