The Icebreaker *Mikula Selianinovich* (1916-1937): To Russia and Back

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En 1916, dès sa sortie des Vickers Yards nouvellement construits à Montréal, le brise-glace Mikula, à l'origine appelé J.D. Hazen, Hull N° 1, fut vendu au gouvernement russe pour contribuer au maintien de la voie navigable de la mer Blanche afin que d'essentiels approvisionnements de guerre puissent continuer à atteindre les Forces russes à travers l'Arkhangelsk. De 1917 à 1920, période de complexité politique en Russie du Nord, le navire fut vendu à maintes reprises et fit face à de nombreuses aventures. En 1919, les Français en prirent possession après le retrait de la Russie du Nord par les forces alliées, puis le vendirent au Canada en 1922 où il commença à occuper le rôle qui lui était originairement destiné : le maintien hivernal de la voie navigable du Saint-Laurent et la prévention d'inondations.

Mikula was a unique ship. It was "Keel No. 1," the first vessel built in the Vickers yards in Montreal. It was also the first icebreaker both designed and built in Canada. It was the only vessel of the ex-Canadian and ex-Newfoundland ice-breaking and ice-capable ships sold to Russia during the First World War armed and registered as an Imperial Russian naval ship; and this Russian service gave *Mikula* an aura of maritime adventure and exoticism. Finally, it was the only ship of all the vessels sold to Russia to return to Canada.

Like a Baltic baron, *Mikula* in its time served many masters - the Imperial Russian government, the Russian Provisional Government, the Bolshevik government, the anti-Bolshevik White Government, the Allied Interventionist forces and then the French government and, finally, the Canadian government. It broke ice and made war; it was banged up and abused; it was scuttled and then raised. And almost always, secrecy, conflict and murk attended key turning-points in the ship's history, from the contractual conflicts at the time of its purchase by the Russian government in 1916 to the back-room machinations of its sale for scrap in 1937. What follows is a history of *Mikula,* a ship which has earned its place in Canadian maritime history.

The Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord, **XII, No. 3 (July 2002), 17-42.**

From the very onset of the First World War, Russia depended very heavily upon Britain and France to satisfy her war needs - munitions and materiel for her armies and provisions of all sorts for her major cities. The Allies, in their turn, desperately needed the Eastern Front. With the Baltic and Black Seas blockaded by the Axis powers, supply to Russia could come only through her northern port of Archangel (Murmansk was not yet built). However, since Archangel was locked up by ice for a full half-year, the acquisition of icebreakers for Russia's North became a matter of life-or-death for the Empire. Russia's own icebreakers were all trapped behind enemy naval blockades - where, then, to find others?

Russia turned to Canada and Newfoundland. By the winter of 1915-1916, virtually the whole of Russia's northern ice-breaking fleet, ten out of 13 vessels, consisted of ex-Canadian ice- breakers and ex-Newfoundland ice-capable ships (sealing steamers and ice-ferries).[1] By late 1915 the issue of supply through the north had assumed cardinal significance. At a decisive meeting of senior officials of the Russian Ministry of Trade and Commerce and the Naval Ministry in December 1915, the Russian government embarked on a very ambitious, far-reaching programme of icebreaker acquisition which foresaw the purchase of nine new icebreakers, all save one to be built in British yards.[2]

That exception was a Canadian ship. Russian officials were very much aware of an icebreaker then under construction in Montreal, and resolved to do everything possible to acquire it for the intended expansion of operations in Russia's north during the upcoming (1916-1917) winter navigation. In fact, they seemed "fired up" with the possibility of purchasing this "powerful icebreaker being built per government contract," scheduled for completion in October of 1916. It was said to be an improved version of *Earl Grey,* which had already more than proved itself in Russia's northern waters since arrival in late October 1914. Moreover, the vessel was already on the stocks, a significant consideration for Russian officials given fears that their icebreaker orders placed with the British Admiralty might be delayed by more pressing British needs.[3] These were the developments, half-a-world away,

For brief cameo-like histories of these ships, see W. Barr, "The Role of Canadian and Newfoundland Ships in the Development of the Soviet Arctic", *Aspects: A Publication of the Newfoundland Historical Society,* IX, No 1, (July 1977), 19-126; and EX, No 2, (November 1977), 17-23.

[2] V. G. Andrienko, *Nevezuchii 'Mikula Selianinovich'* [The Luckless Mikula Selianinovich], *Gangut,* Issue 12, 1997, 52. Andrienko's work is based exclusively on archival sources from the Russian State Archive of the Naval Fleet in St. Petersburg.

[3] Andrienko, *Nevezuchii ...,52.* That Russian officials were "fired up" with the hope of acquiring the Canadian icebreaker then being built is attested by information from Captain John L. Read, who delivered *Minto* to Archangel in January 1916. Captain Read and his crew left for home through Petrograd. When there, the Russian Minister of Trade and Commerce sent for Read, thanked him for the good work done in bringing Minto over, and asked for the name of the appropriate Canadian minister to contact for a written expression of thanks. "He also told me", wrote Captain Read, "[that] Canada was having another ice breaker built by Vickers like the 'Earl Grey' but heavier. I told him I did not know but they insisted that it was correct", an indication that Russia indeed was following icebreaker developments in Canada very closely. National Archives of Canada

which pre-figured for the Canadian icebreaker then under construction in Montreal an intriguing future, and which transformed the *J.D. Hazen* into first *Mikula Selianinovich,* and later simply into *Mikula.*[4]

Vickers Sons and Maxim, promised Canadian government contracts for the construction of naval vessels if it would establish a subsidiary in Canada, chose Montreal for the site of its Canadian yards, and was ready to build by 1913. Expected government orders for naval vessels never materialized. Under pressure to provide the company with some contract - to justify the massive investment in the yards - the Canadian government, on 18 March 1914, signed with Canadian Vickers a contract for the building of an ice breaker.[5] Thus "the keel of the first Canadian Vickers built ship was laid. She was the *J.D. Hazen,* a 275 foot long vessel designed, built and fitted for service in the northern waters of her native land. This was a very important contract for the hull was to prove a schoolroom in which would be taught to young Canadians the art of shipbuilding."[6]

Originally, *J.D. Hazen*[7] was intended for flood control in the St. Lawrence Ship Channel. The *Montcalm* and *Lady Grey* had demonstrated, by 1913, that by keeping the St. Lawrence open during winter, spring floods caused by ice-jams during break-up could be controlled and significant property damage reduced. An open channel during winter also contributed towards increased trade and commerce. With the *Hazen,* the Department of Marine hoped to keep the St. Lawrence open down to Trois Rivieres. Hence the contract with Canadian Vickers. For $998,583.00, the firm was to deliver to the Department, by 30 November 1915, an ice breaker rated at 3,600 indicated horsepower, complete with all machinery, boilers and relevant equipment.[8]

When war broke out, construction on *Hazen* was temporarily deferred; the icebreaker

(NAC), Record Group (RG) 42, Vol 252, File 36926 "Sale of Minto 1915-1916."

[4] The story of the *Mikula Selianinovich* is not unknown but, aside from some general details, only sketchily. Thomas Appleton, for example, wrote a four page cameo history of the ship, of which only a page and one-half speak of her service in Russia (see NAC, RG 12, Vol 3859, File "Appleton file" 2). The file also holds several pages of translated information from one Russian secondary source (N.A. Zalesskii). This present treatment of *the Mikula* story, however, in an effort to flesh it out as much as possible, draws upon many more archival sources, Russian as well as Canadian, and upon many more secondary sources than Appleton had at his disposal.

[5] J.D. King, *The Story of Canadian Vickers Limited,* in NAC, RG 12, Vol 3855, File "Appleton file 5", 1-10.

[6] *Ibid.,\0.*

[7] The icebreaker was named after the Hon. J. D. Hazen, former Premier of New Brunswick, Minister of Marine and Fisheries (1911-1917) and Naval Minister in Robert Borden's Dominion Cabinet. For significant contribution to the war effort, he was later knighted.

[8] T.E. Appleton, *What s in a Name? Mikula,* in NAC, RG 12, Vol 3859, File "Appleton files" 2, 1.

was launched a full half-year later than scheduled, in May 1916.[9] Lady Borden officiated at *Hazen*'s launch, christening the new ship and expressing the wish that the ship "prove a credit to her builders '...And to Canada, land of her birth.'"[10] Speaking after the launch, the Prime Minister intimated that the *Hazen* was not long for Canadian waters: "This ship may be applied to some purpose connected with the carrying on of this war and furnishing of supplies. If such should be the case, and in any case, the Company are to be congratulated for a work which will be in the cause of Empire and the Allied Nations."[11] In fact long before the launching ceremonies Borden knew that the icebreaker was already destined for Russia. Back on 25 February 1916 Bonar Law, Secretary of State for the Colonies, had telegraphed the Governor-General as follows:

> It is the wish of the Russian Government to acquire an icebreaker of the Canadian type which it is understood is being constructed at Vickers' works in Montreal. The Russian Government have been permitted to order six such vessels from the United Kingdom. In the present scarcity of merchant tonnage His Majesty's Government regard the results of Russian port facilities which are expected from the provision of adequate numbers of icebreakers as most important. The Canadian Government will be rendering valuable assistance if they can agree to the transfer of this vessel to the Russian Government and offer such help as is possible to ensure delivery by the middle of October 1916 in readiness for service in the following winter. [12]

This intervention followed a formal Russian government request for the icebreaker, a request born of that critical December 1915 meeting of senior Russian Naval and Trade officials already noted above. Given its dimensions and power, they believed that *Hazen /Mikula* would prove a natural companion to *Sviatogor,* a powerful *Ermak-type* of icebreaker ordered from Armstrong (Newcastle-on-Tyne). Between the two of them, they could keep the *gorlo* (throat) of the White Sea, the most difficult point of transit, open through winter. Conversely, in the event that *Sviatogor* would not be built in time for the 1916-1917

[9] Vickers, casting about for a way to increase its share of war orders, embittered that war contracts were awarded British home yards and even American firms before Canadian, went into secret machinations with Bethlehem Steel and other American interests. These latter, barred by official American neutrality from legally producing articles of war for Europe's belligerents, negotiated with Vickers for use of its yards as the final assembly point for submarines, pre-fabricated in the United States, destined for Allied governments in Europe. Both the American firms and Vickers profited. M L . Hadley and Roger Sarty, *Tin-Pots and Pirate Ships: Canadian Naval Forces and German Sea Raiders 1880-1918,* Montreal, 1991, pp 100-101.

[10] Appleton, *What's in a Name..., 2.*

[11] *Ibid., 2.*

[12] N A C , RG 2, Vol 3693, PC 2006,22 August 1916, 1.

navigation, *Mikula,* whose specifications and characteristics accorded with the proposals of White Sea icebreaker captains consulted prior to developing the plan of acquisition of an icebreaker fleet, could pair up successfully with *Earl Grey.* "[The White Sea captains] maintained that an icebreaker and the ice-cutter would constitute a powerful team, all the more so since *Kanada [ex-Earl Grey]* worked alone wonderfully in ridged moving ice."[13]

As with *Earl Grey* and *Minto,* so with *Hazen* - British authorities "requested" on behalf of Russia, and the Canadian government acceded. On the very next day, 26 February, Ottawa replied in the affirmative, agreeing to the request.[14] Money which Canada had advanced to Vickers for the icebreaker, a sum of $ 349,504.05, was refunded; from then on, Vickers was building for the Russian government.[15]

While there was agreement on this point, the company long delayed signing a contract, holding out for unusual concessions from the Russian government, such as an immediate 50% up-front payment of the full sum of the contract, as well as full payment of balance upon delivery with no 10% retention by purchaser for the guarantee period. The Russian side, eager to get the icebreaker, accepted these conditions and, on 25 May 1916, agreed to pay 3,300,000 roubles for the ship, as well as an additional 100,000 roubles for improvements and changes.[16]

While everything seemed clear, nothing in fact was, and various issues - supervision of construction, final price for the icebreaker, manner of payment of instalments, in fact whether or not a contract had even been signed between Vickers and Russia, and others - continued to be-devil everything connected with *Mikula.* Canadian officials agreed to supervise the construction of the icebreaker on behalf of Russia until the end of the summer.[17] This work was complicated by the fact that during the summer either Vickers proposed, or the Russian government requested, alterations to the original plans, with Canada all the while out of the information loop, yet somehow expected to supervise the vessel's construction, and to request the Russian government to pay out instalments to Vickers as per agreement once construction objectives had been reached.[18] On 28 July, Bonar Law advised the Govemor-

[13] *Ibid., 52.*

[14] NAC, RG2, Vol 3693, PC 2006, 1.

[15] *Ibid.,2.*

[16] Andrienko, *Nevezuchii...,* 53.

[17] NAC, RG 7 (Office of the Governor-General) G 21, War File 14071, Vol 452, File "Vol 29, 1916 April-May, No. 1374."

[18] NAC, RG 7 G 21, War File 14071, Vol 455, File "Vol 32, 1916 May-June, No. 1859"; NAC, RG 7 G 21, War File 14071, Vol 456, File "Vol 33, 1916 June-July, No. 2006"; NAC, RG 7 G 21, War File 14071, Vol 461, File "Vol 39, 1916 July-August, No. 2707"; NAC, RG 7 G 21, War File 14071, Vol 462, File "Vol 39, 1916 July-August, No. 2789." Ultimately, few of the capital changes were effected, given the advanced stage *oiMikula's* construction. However, it seems that some strengthening of the bow was undertaken, as well as re-designing quarters for better warmth, an additional boom-and-crane in the stem, and improvements in the

General that Lt. Col. H.O. Behrens, Imperial Russian Navy, had been appointed inspecting officer for *Hazen,* and was leaving Petrograd shortly for Montreal.[19] It is not clear when Behrens arrived, but it could not have been before mid-August at the earliest.

Work on *Mikula* reached the completion phase in the fall of 1916.[20] A grand ceremony, the "blessing" of the ship, occurred on 12 October, just before the icebreaker went to its sea trials. Assembled aboard *Mikula* were a number of dignitaries, including the Russian Consul-General, N. Struve, stationed in Montreal, and the naval attache from the Imperial Russian embassy in Washington, as well as ranking Canadian officials. The service invoking God's blessings upon the ship was performed by Alexander, the Orthodox Bishop of Canada, assisted by a number of churchmen of various levels. *Mikula* truly, it seems, was a subject of significance for Russians, given that such high officials attended the ceremony. A report on this event notes that Russian naval engineers were indeed present, and makes the peculiar assertion that most of the ship's crew were of Russian sailors. The ceremony was most effective, eliciting from the English- and French-speaking Canadian officials aboard expressions of "Nice, very nice."[21]

While the ceremony went well, negotiations with Vickers regarding final cost of the icebreaker, however, were not proceeding as well, and threatened to delay, if not altogether sink, the transfer of ownership of the vessel to the Russian government. Back on 6 September, the Canadian government had informed London that it had contemplated transferring to the Russian government the "entire advantage of [the] contract" made between itself and Canadian Vickers. Further, it wished that the Russian government should benefit by the "moderate price at which the contract [had been] placed."[22] During October and November both governments, Canadian and British, worked to secure for Russia the original 1914 base price for the *Mikula,* arguing that Vickers' new price (£330,000, plus an additional charge of £16,000 for other ameliorations requested by die Russian government), was not justified. It became clear that, while Russia and Vickers had come to an understanding on price and

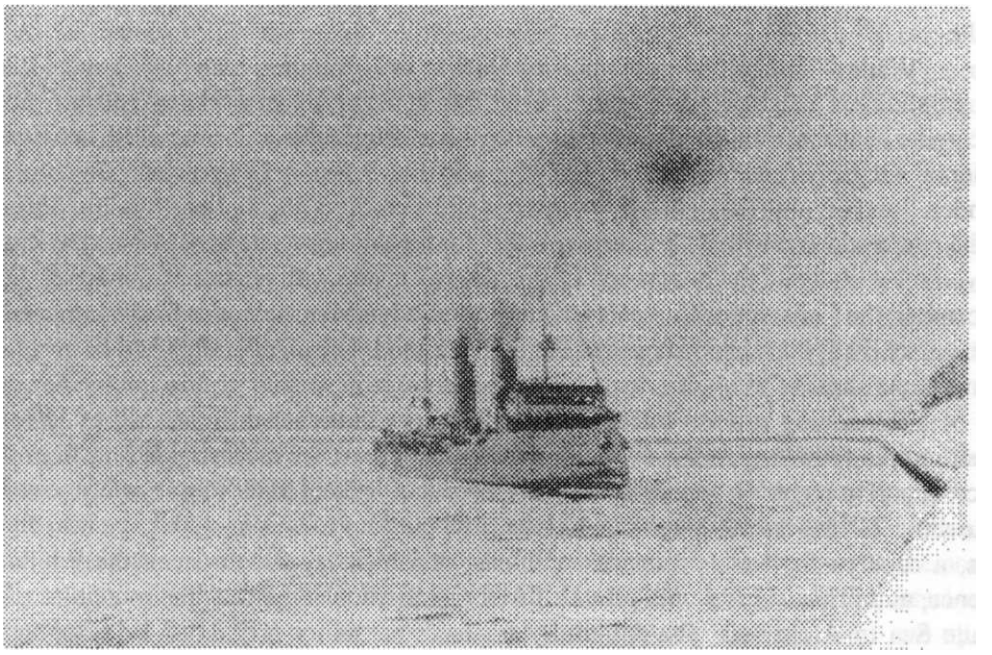
construction of the deadwood pipes. See Andrienko, *Nevezuchii...,* 53.

[19] NAC, RG 7 G 21, War File 14071, Vol 1461, File "Vol 39, 1916 July-August, No. 2707" Captain B.G. Brand accompanied Behrens; a mechanical engineer, he oversaw the installation and testing of boilers and machinery. In Andrienko, *Nevezuchii...,* 54.

[20] Despite oversight and price and contract problems, work on the icebreaker continued. The vessel had been launched on 2 May, 1916. By 6 May, work on hull and superstructure was completed and the boilers and stacks set; by 9 August engines were mounted and minor modifications done (with some strengthening of the bow); on 12 October the icebreaker went to sea for three days of trials, which proved satisfactory, save that for want of good coal and experienced firemen the boilers and engines had not been taken to full throttle. Andrienko, *Nevezuchii...,* 54-55.

[21] Moriak [A Sailor], "Osviashchenie Russkogo Ledokola 'Mikula Selianinovich'" [The Blessing of the Russian Icebreaker 'Mikula Selianinovich", in *Amerikanskii Pravoslavnyi Vestnik* [The American Orthodox Herald], No. 41, 1916, p 645.

[22] NAC, RG 7 G 21, War File 14071, Vol 1462, File "Vol 40, 1916 August-September, No. 2959."



The *Mikula,* probably at Quebec.
Source: Livernois Studio, National Archives of Canada, PA-23396

contract in May, no new contract had in fact been struck, and Vickers held out doggedly for its new price. Thus, the Canadian government awaited instructions for a "formal" contract transfer. With the vessel soon ready to sail, given this contractual confusion, Canada informed London that "clearance will be withheld unless satisfactory arrangements are concluded with the Russian government in the meantime."[23]

Ciphers continued to cross the ocean throughout late November and early December regarding final price, payment instalments and contractual responsibilities of various parties,[24] while naval men chafed at the delay. Bonar Law informed arguing parties that "Admiralty have informed me that it is most important in the interests of British shipping in the White Sea and of the Allies generally that vessel should reach her destination at earliest possible date,"[25] stressing time and again that "immediate departure of the vessel... is essential to the conduct

[23] NAC, RG 7 G 21, War File 14071, Vol 464, File "Vol 41, 1916 October-November, No. 3399"; NAC, RG 7 G 21, War File 14071, Vol 467, File "Vol 45, 1916 November-December, No. 4001."

[24] NAC, RG 7 G 21, War File 14071, Vol 468, File "Vol 46, 1916 November-December, Nos. 4080, 4124, 4148, 4163, 4091, 4192, 4209, 4326."

[25] NAC, RG 7 G 21, War File 14071, Vol 468, File "Vol 45, 1916 November-December, No. 4080."

of the war."[26]

While *Mikula* stood in the port of Quebec in November, readying for her Atlantic transit, she blew a high pressure cylinder head, which required two weeks to replace.[27] In mid-December Canada, "much dissatisfied with the arrangements ... concluded between the Colonial Office, Vickers Limited, London, and the Russian Government Committee in London," and arguing that it had been kept out of the contract negotiations, washed her hands of the matter, declaring that "full responsibility for the arrangements under which the Russian Government obtained the possession of this vessel" rested with parties in London.[28] On 15 December, the Collector of Customs at Quebec was advised of clearance for *Mikula,* and that "the vessel [had] been handed over to the Russians and the sailing orders had been received from the Admiralty."[29]

The sailing orders, dated 12 December 1916, instructed the master of *Mikula* to adhere to the following route: steam through the St. Lawrence as desirable but, from Cape Race, depart at nightfall, approach as the west coast of Iceland as closely as safety permitted, follow the 73rd latitude to longitude 40 East, and put into Iukanskii anchorage near Sviatoi Nos, a cape on the Kola Peninsula south-east of which lay the throat of the White Sea. Thence, authorities there would provide further instructions regarding the route through the White Sea to Archangel. The Admiralty advised that every precaution be taken against submarine attack, especially off the coasts of Iceland and Norway, as well as off the approaches to Iukanskii. The vessel was to show no lights along the route save when finally making the harbour itself.[30]

Captain John L. Read, selected to run *Mikula* to Russia, suggested an alternative route: steam through the Strait of Belle Isle and, after feinting a course for Cape Race during

[26] NAC, Sir Robert L. Borden, MG 26 H, Vol 55, pp 27320, 27315, 27311.

[27] Andrienko, *Nevezuchii...,* 55.

[28] NAC, RG 7 G 21, War File 14071, Vol 468, File "Vol 46, 1916 November-December, No. 4326". The machinations behind the sale of *Mikula* received a different interpretation with Sir Wilfrid Laurier. The Canadian government bore responsibility for the steeply increased price *for Mikula.* The Canadian government, Laurier wrote, had agreed to transfer *Mikula* to the Russian government at the request of the British government. However, instead of transferring the contract, it had cancelled it altogether, allowing Vickers "to make a new sale to the Russian Government at a greatly increased price". The Auditor General himself had protested this action, advising the government by letter of 25 August 1916 to directly transfer its contract to the Russian government; the Canadian government, however, had refused, thus forcing the Russian government to pay "a very much increased price" [NAC, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, MG 26 G, Vol 707, p 195250]. This assertion seems to have been correct, attested to by some brief correspondence in the Robert Borden L. Papers, [NAC, MG 26, H, Vol 55, p 27276],

[29] NAC, RG 7 G 21, War File 14071, Vol 468, File "Vol 46, 1916 November-December, No. 4326."

[30] NAC, RG 24 (Department of National Defence), Vol 3737, File 1048-22-164 *"Mikula* - Sailing Orders, 1916."

the day of departure (in the event some one was watching), pass between Iceland and Greenland and "make the easting North of the Arctic Circle in darkness." This was more or less the route he had followed in late 1915, when delivering *Minto* to Russia. During that run he had seen neither patrol boats nor submarines. Finally, this route shortened the voyage "by a considerable distance, by taking the Great Circle Track."[31] Though the archival record gives no confirmation, Read probably followed his more northerly route.

Mikula sailed for Russia just before Christmas; the Collector of Customs at the Port of Quebec wired Naval the following message on 21 December - "I have the honour to confirm my code message of this date, which read as follows: 'Re Russian Ice Breaker left Dec. 21st. 10.A.M. for Archangel, speed 11 Knots, passage 17 days."'[32] *Mikula* reached Russia's northern waters, putting in at Iokanga, on the eve of 6 January 1917, Christmas eve according to the Russian Old Style (Julian) calendar. After coaling, she set course for Archangel, making port on 11 January.[33] Order No. 21 of the Russian Fleet and the Naval Department, issued on 19 January 1917, registered the icebreaker into the lists of the fleet, "in the class of sea-going icebreakers, [under the] name of *Mikula Selianinovich."* Although Canadian government records refer to *Hazen* as *Mikula* from July 1916 onwards, the name, "in accordance with the will of His Majesty," had been officially accorded to the vessel only on 11 September 1916.[34] The flag of St. Andrew and the ship's banner were run up on *Mikula* on 22 January 1917, when a Russian Naval crew came aboard.[35]

Regarding *Mikula's* name T. Appleton wrote in 1973, "nothing has so far come to light on the origins of the elusive *Seleaninovitch* [sic] but, whether Czarist lady or heroine of the Revolution, the subject would be an intriguing research project ...There is of course the risk of disillusionment, the story might turn out to be anything but romantic."[36] But there was romance to the name. The Emperor had earlier approved the proposal of the Ministry of Trade and Commerce, seconded by the Naval Ministry, to name new icebreakers after *bogatyri,* legendary folk heros out of Russia's past, "powerful people, the heroes of popular stories, songs and legends."[37] *Mikula Selianinovich* was such a legendary figure:

Andrienko, *Nevezuchii...,* 56

[34] Russian State Archives of the Naval Fleet (RGAVMF), Fonds 249, Opis 1, delo 102, 1. Of all the icebreakers and ice-capable vessels sent from Canada to Russia, *Mikula* was the only ship registered into the Russian Navy; all the others were with the merchant fleet of the Russian Ministry of Trade and Commerce.

[35] RGAVMF, Fonds 417, Opis 1, delo 4515, 30. So stretched were Russia's naval reserves that the Russia crew had been assembled from various fleets from all over the Empire, from fleets and flotillas from as far away as the Amur River and Vladivostock. Andrienko, *Nevezuchii...,* 55.

[36] NAC, RG 12, Vol 3859, File "Appleton files 1 and 2."

[37] In Brokgauz and Efron, *Malyi Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar* [The Small Encyclopaedic Dictionary], (reprint of 1907 edition), Moscow, 1994, Vol. I, 470.

> In Rus of ancient times it so happened that the labour of the ploughman was to plough the field, and the duty of the warrior was to defend the ploughman's land and toil ... Here rides *Volga Sviatoslavovich* with his warrior band in the open fields and he hears ... 'the plough in the ploughman's hands [creaking], scraping along stones ... that's *Mikula Selianinovich,* toning the sod.'[38]

Perhaps syncretized in the popular mind with St. Nicholas the miracle worker, *Mikula* was "a miraculous ploughman, bearing 'the weight of the world' on his shoulders.'"[39] The name was both patriotic (a connection with a hero of the legendary past) and most appropriate, as this *Mikula* also ploughed (breaking a way through ice), and also worked to secure the well-being of society in a time of trouble (securing for Russia supplies necessary to survival).

Several days before *Mikula's* arrival, Russian naval officials were already making plans for the return journey of the Canadian crew. Admiral Kobrin, writing from Naval HQ in Archangel to Petrograd on 16 January, indicated that, towards the end of the week, an "American crew"[40] would arrive in Petrograd. It should be returned to "Montreal in America" by way of Bergen (Sweden).[41]

All costs connected with the delivery of *Mikula,* as well as securing the return of the crew to Canada, were borne by the Russian government. Captain N.N. Veselago,[42] in a detailed memorandum of 8 February 1917, fearing long delays, advised against return through Bergen and recommended the Trans-Siberian to Vladivostock, thence to Vancouver and on to Montreal by rail. Though it would cost approximately 1,000[43] roubles per man, such expenditures had been foreseen and the money was available. On 9 February, the following day, the Naval Ministry approved Veselago's recommendation.[44]

After several days of feting in Archangel, between 19-21 January the Canadians set out for Petrograd in four staggered groups, travelling the first leg by open sleigh in -24 degree weather, the rest of the way by train on the recently-opened Murmansk-Petrograd line. "They arrived in Petrograd and spent three weeks in that interesting place ... It was here that they

[38] G.S. Beliakov, *Slavianskaia mifologiia* [Slavic Mythology], Moscow, 1995, frontispiece.

[39] Brokgauz and Efron, *Malyi...,* Vol I, 470.

[40] In ordinary conversation it was usual for Russians to treat North America as one entity, simply calling it "America". This referred, of course, not solely to the United States, but to the whole of the continent. Thus, Canadian cities and locales were simply identified as in "America," meaning the North American continent.

[41] RGAVMF, Fonds 418, Opis 1, delo 3150,20,22.

[42] Captain N. N. Veselago was Acting Chief, Naval Ministry, White Sea and Murmansk Regions, making him the ranking officer in Russia's northern waters.

[43] The exchange rate, at that time, was 3.02 roubles to $1.00.

[44] RGAVMF, Fonds 418, Opis 1, delo 5011, 3.

heard of and saw certain phases of the revolution. "[45] Since the Trans-Siberian to Vladivostock took 15 days, and the Canadians were there by 16 March,[46] *Mikula's* crew and officers left the capital even as the March revolution had already erupted in Petrograd's streets. On 15 March the Canadians departed Vladivostok for Yokohama, whence they boarded the CPR's *Empress of Russia* for the trans-Pacific crossing, arriving in Vancouver on 4 April 1917. By the time they had made their way home (most of the crew and officers were Prince Edward Islanders) they had completed a full circumnavigation of the globe.[47] It is a shame indeed that neither Captain Read, nor any of his officers or men for that matter, never penned their memoirs.

Although naval officialdom in St. Petersburg had awaited *Mikula* with great anticipation, the ship's arrival in Archangel went relatively unnoticed. Winter navigation was fully under way, with the icebreakers *Kniaz Pozharskii* and *KozmaMinin,* fresh out of British yards, bearing the main burden of moving merchantmen through ice. Soon enough *Mikula* drew attention to itself, but of a less-than-desirable kind. The ship, under Captain V.F. Snarskii, went to work the ice for the first time on 31 January 1917, in the area of Ekonomiia (a fore-port of Archangel), and immediately broke her towing winch, necessitating a return to Archangel for repairs. *Mikula* next steamed out on 9 February; while towing *Rusanov* through the ice, the latter unexpectedly went forward, ran up *onMikula's* stern, and deformed her steering mechanism. *Mikula* worked on, but three days later lost three blades of her right screw. The ship's divers and crew managed to replace the missing blades with reserves, but to little overall avail for, on 20 February, the ship lost all the blades of the right screw, sheared off to their mountings. On 22 February *Mikula* docked in Archangel, and her crew commenced extensive repairs.[48] "Failure [seemed to] follow the ship"[49], and hence was born the ship's sobriquet - *Mikula* the "luckless."

By late February of 1917 it was clear that *Mikula* had come to Russia with defective screws. Vickers agreed to machine and ship out improved blades; in the meantime the last of the reserve blades were mounted, and on 4 April *Mikula* again tried its luck. Working in weak ice, the ship tried to open a way for several freighters this time through the mouth of the North Dvina, from Archangel proper to the port of Solombala on the south shore. Again blades gave way, four on the left screw, as well as one on the right Again *Mikula* put back into the main port of Archangel. Further inspection revealed that, despite her newness, the icebreaker had developed a number of problems: her deadwood pipes were leaking, her decking had

The Vancouver Daily Sun, 5 April 1917, "Canadian Sailors Go Round the Globe; Break Ice in Russian Ports," 4.

[46] RGAVMF, Fonds 418, Opis 1, delo 5011, 17.

[47] *The Vancouver Daily Sun*

[48] Andrienko, *Nevezuchii...,* 56-57.

[49] *Ibid.* 56.

separated, her boilers leaked at seams and machinery parts were damaged.[50]

The summer and fall of 1917 *Mikula* spent in repairs. All the while the vessel was listed as on active service because, given her powerful radio transmitter, *Mikula* flew the flag of the Commanding Officer, Fleet of the Northern Frozen Ocean. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why running *Mikula* into dry-dock - necessitating a trip to England - was put off for the whole of the summer of 1917. *Mikula's* captain, writing on 1 October to fleet HQ regarding the scheduling of icebreakers for maintenance in British yards, argued that without overhaul and repairs, *Mikula* would be "fully unprepared for ice-breaking work" in the upcoming winter. While Vickers was to ship over a completely new deadwood system, as well as strengthened screw blades, it was still necessary to do a thorough inspection of *Mikula* before the one-year guarantee period expired in November, which categorically demanded a run to a British yard.[51]

The captain's advice was disregarded. Towards the end of October, with the new blades finally at hand, *Mikula* was towed to Ekonomiia, into the small "English" (i.e. "floating") dry-dock, where the new blades were finally mounted, and the ship's hull repainted. In December, two 76 mm cannon and four machine guns were mounted on *Mikula,*[51] probably after the seizure of Archangel by Bolshevik sailors.

The icebreaker did no work in the fall and winter of 1917. Given the very uncertain political situation in Russia after the Bolshevik seizure of power in February 1917, few cargo ships made for Archangel. On all vessels sailors' committees, created following the revolution, gradually began to extend their control over ships and officers, paralyzing naval operations. Following the October Revolution in that same year, the victorious Bolsheviks played on class divisions, and called for full authority to pass to "democratic institutions" created by the revolution itself - to sailors' committees and commissars. On 2 December, the Bolshevized sailors of Archangel ran up red flags on all naval ships then in harbour, including *Mikula.* After a protracted struggle with the Archangel Soviet (then still dominated by non-Bolshevik parties), the mass of sailors of Archangel, supported by port workers and other labourers, forced new elections upon the Soviet, which, given a much limited mandate, produced a Bolshevik majority. Thus both the sailors' organization and the Archangel Soviet passed into Bolshevik hands. *Mikula* had gone red and her crew, like the crews of all other vessels stationed in Archangel, spent the winter carefully monitoring their officers, from whom they

[51] R G A V M F , Fonds 378, Opis 1, delo 16, 186-188.

[52] Andrienko, *Nevezuchii...,* 57. Another source suggests that, in addition to this armament, *Mikula* also received two 120 mm cannon. See Ministerstvo Oborony SSSR [Ministry of Defence of the USSR], *Korabli i vspomagatel'nye suda Voenno-morskogo Flota. 1917-1927 gg. Spravochnik* [Ships and Auxiliary Vessels of the Naval Fleet. 1917-1927. Guide], Moscow, 1981.

expected counter-revolution.[53]

In late March, the Archangel Soviet was directed by Moscow to undertake operations against White Finnish forces[54] trying to seize the recently-completed Murmansk Railroad, and "a unit of the Red Army was despatched from Archangel on the icebreaker *Mikula Selianinovich.* "[55] On 3 April 1918 *Mikula* put out of Archangel towards Kem, making its way more or less westerly across the White Sea. It carried 53 passengers and a 120-man partisan unit of the Red Army; as well its deck was crowded with crates of rifles, cartridges and machine guns. On 4 April, the icebreaker passed the bar of the North Dvina River at 7:00 a.m., steaming westwards. By 6 April *Mikula* had almost reached her destination, Kem on Popov Island, but could not break through to the port itself because of very thick ice. There the ship unloaded cartridges and rifles for local Red forces, while the partisan unit she had been conveying left for Kem by foot. While taking on coal (brought by wagons over snow and ice) and water between 12 and 16 April, *Mikula* from time to time fired her guns at enemy positions. On 17 April a unit of Red Guards and a Food Requisitioning Committee came aboard; the ship was to deliver them to the Solovetskii Islands on the return route, and steamed for Archangel, making port on 20 April.[56]

Ultimately, the battle against the White Finns in the Kem area proved more smoke than fire. "No more than 500 people participated in the [White] attack on Kem. The operation had an amateurish character. The Finnish attack was repulsed with great losses for them. In the battles in the Kem area... [inter alia] the sailors from the ice breaker *Mikula Selianinovich* took part."[57] Still, as pro-Bolshevik elements in the area recognized, "had the icebreaker not

The other armed vessels were as follows: *Mikula's* partner icebreaker, *Sviatogor,* the auxiliary yacht *Gorislava;* the hydrographie ice-capable vessels *Taimyr* and *Vaigach;* and 10 minesweepers (9 operational). These vessels were reported by Admiral Vikorst to be in Archangel as of 14 July 1918 (RGAVMF, Fonds 378, Opis 1, delo 16, 382). It is probable that this complement had remained unchanged since winter, because Murmansk was under the control of non-Bolshevik forces, and with a heavy presence of Allied war ships in the White Sea, Archangel's Bolshevik authorities would not likely have risked the vessels under their control by allowing them to operate at sea. Several fleet reorganizations by Admiral N.E. Vikorst, of 10 April and 7 May 1918, continued to base *both Mikula* and *Sviatogor* in Archangel, and indicated that both ships were in battle readiness. Akademiia Nauk [Ioffe, A.E., V.M. Koval'chuk et al], *Voennye moriaki* v *borbe za vlast' Sovetov na severe (1917-1920 gg.). Sbornik dokumentov* [Naval Sailors in the Struggle for Soviet Power in the North (1917-1920). A Collection of Documents], Leningrad, 1982, 119,127.

[54] The White Finns, after suppressing the Red Finns following the Revolution of 1917 with German assistance, dreamed of restoring Finnish sovereignty over the Kola Peninsula and Karelia (just below it). Thus, in early March 1918 they despatched forces towards Kem (on the White Sea), towards Engozero and Pongo in Karelia, towards Kandalaksha at the base of the Kola Peninsula and towards Pechenga on the coast of the Barents Sea.

V. V. Tarasov, *Bor 'ba s interventami na Severe Rossii (1918-1920)* [The Struggle with the Interventionists in the North of Russia (1918-1919)], Moscow, 1958,44.

[56] RGAVMF, Fonds 378, Opis 1, delo 67, 1-5.

[57] Akademiia Nauk, *Voennye moriaki...,* 3"0.

appeared Kem would not be ours."[58] Perhaps what is more interesting than *Mikula's* military campaign is the story of the her travails at the hands of her sailor-masters, which well demonstrates the mortal threat to any ship then managed by revolutionary sailors' committees and commissars.

On 9 April, just outside Kem, in trying to work herself out of ice, *Mikula* had run at full speed onto a submerged bar; shoaled at mid-tide, she had to sit seven hours until she could get off with a rising tide. During these seven hours, no one checked either the lower hold or the ballast tanks for leaks. Once free, the ship came up to Popov Island and sent down its diver to check the hull; however, the water was too shallow for the diver to inspect the keel. Only then did the vessel's command personnel discover that ballast tank No. 4 on the port side could not be pumped clear of water, which was both salty and level with the waterline; in their opinion the ship had suffered either a plate break in that area, or a seam rupture, as a result of the shoaling.[59]

On the return voyage to Archangel, off Malyi Rombak Island, *Mikula* again experienced an emergency, this time far more serious. At 4:30 [p.m.] on 18 April, on a clear day with all landmarks visible, while running "at full speed *[Mikula]* struck bottom on the starboard side, heaviest in the stern." The helmsman, then being spelled by an assistant, felt "the whole ship shudder ... [and] ... rock violently" at the moment of impact, while the assistant reported that *Mikula* was thrown sharply to starboard. The "commander" immediately gave the order to stop engines. *Mikula* had glanced off a rock reef at full speed, and ripped herself open. The strike was so severe that the a senior assistant to the command, running up onto the main deck, saw water shooting up through "signal tube No. 5," while the 3rd mechanic rushed up to report "water erupting out of the first boiler on the port side." The 1st mechanic, feeling the strike, descended into the hold and, coming to boiler No. 7, saw "water rushing in along the whole wall of the left bulkhead; the inflow of water was very strong; all the pumps were sent into action."[60]

Once the forward motion of the ship ceased, the ship's commissar ordered the anchor dropped, waterproof bulkheads closed and pumping commenced. Command personnel immediately radioed Archangel, which instructed them to await the assistance of *Sviatogor;* somewhat later *Mikula* was instructed to return to Kem, the nearest port. Once divers went over the side, they located a gash in mid-plate, near cross-frame No. 97, half-an-inch in width and approximately five feet long, in the bow area (near ballast tanks No. 5 and No. 6).[61] Despite the severity of the holing, and in contravention of instructions to put into Kem, *Mikula*

N.A. Zalesskii, *FlotRusskogo Severa v gody pervoi mirovoi i grazhdanskoi voin* [The Fleet of the Russian North During the First and Civil Wars], *Letopis Severa* [Chronicle of the North], No. VI, Moscow, 1972,147.

[59] R G A V M F, Fonds 378, Opis 1, delo 16, 337, 337 (verso), 338, 338 (verso), 339; Fonds 378, Opis 1, delo 67, 2.

[60] R G A V M F, Fonds 378, Opis 1, delo 16, 337 (verso), 339 (verso), 339, 339 (verso).

[61] R G A V M F, Fonds 378, Opis 1, delo 16, 337 (verso), 338 (verso), 339, 339 (verso).

nonetheless sailed for Archangel, making port on 20 April.

The above information regarding *Mikula's* "adventures" came out during an investigation conducted by a commission established on 23 April to determine both the causes of *Mikula'%* misfortunes, and the extent of damage suffered by the ship. It consisted of a hydrographer and nine other members (no officers were named to the commission). The commission's findings pointed, not surprisingly, to command shortcomings as the fundamental cause of the icebreaker's travails. During her foray against the White Finns, *Mikula* had been managed by a "command committee;" it's pre-eminent member had been Antufiev, identified as a "sailor'and as commissar of the ship. It became clear that local pilots had been given far too much leeway in course decisions; far too much credence had been given divers' reports which were dismissive of the severity of damage sustained; there had been absolute disregard for the formal captain's warnings regarding handling of the ship; even the ship's log was so poorly kept that the location of the ship's holing had not been determined and entered.[62]

The gravity of command confusion was perhaps best exemplified in the decision to continue to Archangel. The captain[63] of *Mikula* had warned that the ship might be lost were it to meet up with heavy ice after the serious hull rupture on 18 April; but bis objections had been dismissed by the committee. Antufiev had happened to agree with the captain; but even the political commissar, in these very early days of the new Soviet order, and in a region very distant from the centre, was only one voice of many. In the spirit of true "revolutionary democracy," ignoring commissar, captain and instructions from headquarters, the ship's command committee had resolved to sail for Archangel. Direct democracy even complicated the final mooring of *Mikula.* Originally, the ship had put into Ekonomiia, Archangel's forward port, and the engines had been shut down. An hour or so later they were fired up again, since the ratings had decided that the ship should proceed to Solombala, an inner port. *KereMikula* finally moored, with its pumps running intermittently, five minutes at a time, at 12-14 minute intervals, pumping out 1,200 tons of water every hour.[64] In truth, during her foray against the Whites, *Mikula* had been in far less danger from either enemy forces or from the normal hazards of navigation in dangerous waters than from the incompetence and carelessness of those who ran her.

The commission recommended that, since Archangel had no dry-dock, *Mikula* "must be sent immediately with an escort to one of Norway's ports to go into dry-dock for repairs." It also recommended the ship's return to Ekonomiia, where damage could be better assessed. At the time of the commission's closing and final report on 17 June, *Mikula* was docked at

[62] R G A V M F , Fonds 378, Opis 1, delo 16, 337(verso), 338(verso); Fonds 378, Opis 1, delo 67,4(verso), 5.

[63] Officer-rank captains continued to serve on each ship, necessary for their over-all technical skills. However, they were there in an advisory capacity. A11 final decisions were in the hands of ships' committees and commissars, the latter being political appointments to assure adherence to the Communist Party, its principles and instructions.

[64] R G A V M F , Fonds 378, Opis 1, delo 16, 337(verso), 338(verso); Fonds 378, Opis 1, delo 67,4(verso), 5.

Solombala, with two-thirds of its keel nestled into the harbour mud.[65] And in all likelihood that is how *Mikula* remained until the need arose to pump it free of water. Even if the Soviet authorities had had budgetary resources to cover costs of repair, it is not likely that it would have risked running *Mikula* to Norway for fear that the ship could have been seized by Allied vessels, which exercised de facto control over the whole of the White Sea.

Throughout July 1918 the Allies, based in Murmansk, (whose Soviet had broken relations with Moscow), had begun landing their forces in ports along the west coast of the White Sea (Iokanga, Kem and Soroka), drawing ever nearer to Archangel. The Allies justified this occupation as necessary to deny the Germans, working through White Finland, control over the strategic Murmansk Railroad, possible seizure of White Sea ports to use as naval bases, and the vast stores of Allied munitions in Archangel. Those very Allies were soon to appear in Archangel itself, and *Mikula* was destined to meet up with them.

Both the Red sailors and Bolshevik Soviet authorities in the Archangel Soviet were perfectly aware that the Allies intended to move against "Red Archangel." In fact, under directives from Moscow, from March 1918 on they had been shipping as much as possible of the huge stocks of war materiel and munitions stored in the ports of the city into the interior, and undertaking local defensive measures.

On 31 July British and French forces took Onega, a major port on the south shore of the White Sea, debarking troops who occupied the town. The following day, after quickly silencing Soviet batteries on Mudiug Island (which guarded the approaches to Archangel), the Allied vessels had a clear road into Archangel proper.[66]

To bar that road, the Bolshevik Defence Council, adhering to plans prepared earlier, sent out the icebreakers *Sviatogor* and *Mikula.* One report suggests that, during the engagement between the Allied warships and the Mudiug Island batteries, "the icebreakers *Sviatogor andMikula Selianinovich* ... assisted our battery with their fire." This is probably an empty assertion, found in a summary report written in mid-October addressed to Lenin himself, hyperbolizing the defence and evacuation of Archangel by the Bolsheviks.[67] But both icebreakers did cover the escape of the Bolshevik defenders of Mudiug Island, driving off a seaplane which sought to strafe them as they fled for the mainland in a tug.[68]

However, they could not duel with cruisers, and the Bolshevik Defence Council ordered the two icebreakers scuttled.

Given the unavoidable ... penetration by [Allied] cruisers into the mouth of

[65] *Ibid.,* 342 (verso).

[66] *Ibid.,* 134-135.

[67] *Ibid.,* 135. The report was written by S. and A. Popov, the former the Chairman of the Arkhnagelsk Provincial Executive Committee, the latter his aide (and possibly brother).

[68] M.S. Kedrov, *Za Sovetskii sever* [For A Soviet North], Leningrad, 1927, 117.

> the Dvina, the icebreakers *Mikula* and *Sviatogor* were sunk in the river's mouth; a third vessel, the *Ussuri,* was also sunk there. The sinking of the vessels was by means of opening their Kingston valves. Realizing that there was a possibility of a quick re-floating [of the scuttled ships], a group of sailors.. .set out on a cutter to where the ships had been sunk, with a view to blowing them up with slabs of gun-cotton, but unfortunately the charges did not ignite, an enemy airplane began descending and strafing the sailors with its machine gun, and a number of them were wounded. The attempt to blow up the [scuttled] ships failed.[69]

The scuttling at least delayed the Allies; this is clear from the fact that on 2 August the Bolsheviks were still in Archangel, rapidly loading whatever stores they could onto river barges to move inland. On that day, telegrams were exchanged between ranking Bolsheviks in Archangel and Moscow, discussing whether or not the "task of blowing up the two sunken icebreakers in the mouth of the Dvina [had been completed];"[70] the matter was, obviously, of great concern, lest two of Russia's newest and strongest icebreakers fall into enemy hands.

Regarding the effectiveness of the scuttling, M.S. Kedrov, present at these events and shortly to become chief political commissar for the whole of Archangel province during the Soviet struggle to retake the northern region, provides conflicting evidence. "The vessels scuttled in the mouth of the Dvina held back the entry of enemy cruisers for a long time," he wrote afterwards, forcing the Interventionists to land troops elsewhere, with the result that they had not yet reached Archangel by 2 August, although Allied seaplanes flew above the city, raining down masses of proclamations.[71] Later, in the same account, he notes:

> To clear the forward channel of the sunken and blown [sic!] ships would have taken, at the very least, two-three weeks, but here, on the very first day of the occupation of Archangel [3 August], there appeared the cruiser *Attentive* which, approaching almost right up to the left bank of the Dvina, opened fire upon the railroad apron and the station buildings.[72]

These were still held by Bolsheviks forces.

To discover how Allied vessels had entered the inner port of Archangel so rapidly, Kedrov conducted his own investigation, discussing the issue with a certain Osadshyi, who

I. Mints and E. Gorodetskii, *Dokumenty po istorii grazhdanskoi voiny v SSSR.* [Documents on the History of the Civil War in the USSR], Moscow, 1941, Vol L 194.

[70] Kedrov, *Za Sovetskii...,* 94.

[71] *Ibid.,96.*

[72] *Ibid.,* 99.

had commanded the batteries on Mudiug Island and had fled the island and a pursuing seaplane under cover of *Mikula* and *Sviatogor's* guns.

> We met up with the ice breakers [recalled Osadshyi]...When we learned that preparations were already under way to scuttle them, I was exceedingly surprised, and enquired why [they] had selected such a broad expanse of water and were located, it seems, well beyond the forward channel. I received the answer: we are fulfilling the order of the commander, in full conformity with it.[73]

In fact, Osadshyi continued, the scuttling of the icebreakers, as well as many other actions in Archangel at the moment of the arrival of Allied forces, was attributable to treason, betrayal by the Whites, especially the officers. Regarding the two icebreakers, Osadshyi enquired why it was that the only two armed vessels in Archangel, with a capacity to offer resistance to the Interventionists, were scuttled, when other ships were available for the purpose? Why was the scuttling so poorly performed, in an inappropriate location, which in no wise constituted any serious impediment to entry into the main channel? Why had the gun-cotton slabs and charges not detonated when set on the scuttled ships? His conclusion - the high naval command in Archangel had been "at the service of foreign consuls and had fulfilled to the letter directives issued to it."[74] It was Vice Admiral N.E. Vikorst, Chief of the Naval Fleet, abetted by the senior officers aboard the icebreakers, who had betrayed the cause.[75]

Hence the great cry of betrayal that went up around the fall of Arkhangelsk, and a useful exoneration for local Bolshevik leaders, which eased their accounting before Lenin and Trotsky, both of whom considered the fall of Archangel a very menacing development. That officers would not support Red Sailors and the Soviet was not surprising. And while their co-operation with the Allies eased Allied entry into the city, its seizure was a foregone conclusion once the Allies had decided to strike - the Bolsheviks at that time had pitiable land and sea resources with which to contest control of the city. And yet the notion of betrayal became so fixed - in fact, such a constant of most Soviet writings, reflecting as it did the fundamental premise of Bolshevik ideology, ie, unremitting class struggle against all opponents of the working classes who were prepared to betray them at a moment's notice - that some years after the end of Intervention sailors, more likely sailor commissars charged with monitoring actions of officers aboard both *Sviatigor and Mikula,* were brought to trial for treason.[76]

[73] *Ibid.,* 117.

[74] *Ibid.,* 120.

[75] Zalesskii, *Flot Russkogo Severa...*,147.

[76] A. Popov, *Bibliografiia interventsii i grazhdanskoi voiny na severe* [Bibliography on the Intervention and on the Civil War in the North], Arkhangelsk, 1928, 10. This publication was put out by the Party Historical Institute of the Executive Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Archangel. It notes that

Once Archangel was in the hands of the Allies, they quickly turned their attention to raising the scuttled icebreakers. They had been sent down by the simple opening of their Kingston valves; thus, "with the simple assistance of divers one could close the valves and pump out the water, and the ship [bobbed] up to the surface like a cork."[77] Rear Admiral T.W. Kemp, Senior Naval Officer, White Sea, in his deposition to Parliament, reported that in the Archangel action "it was found that two large icebreakers, *Sviatogor* and *Mikula,* had been sunk ... [They] were raised shortly afterwards."[78] Thus *Mikula* passed into the hands of its fourth master in the space of 18 months - first the Imperial Russian Navy, then the Navy of the Russian Republic, then service under Red sailors and the Bolshevik Soviet of Archangel, and now the Allies.

In the fall of 1918, *Mikula* finally sailed to Britain for long-overdue repairs and refit.[79] The British then turned the ship over to the French, perhaps a sharing out of the spoils of war, since Britain held onto *Sviatogor,* the larger of the two icebreakers (until 1922). After refit, *Mikula* returned to the White Sea. A contemporary recorded her transit from Murmansk to Archangel in the very early spring of 1919 on *Mikula,* as the icebreaker, working with *Sviatogor,* led the *War Grange,* with its precious cargo of airplanes, through to Archangel. The two "powerful icebreakers" succeeded in getting "that big hulk of a steamer" through the "ice-jammed bottleneck of the White Sea."[80] As the Imperial authorities had foreseen in 1915-1916, when so eager to purchase *Mikula* to work as consort to *Sviatogor,* the two icebreakers could successfully handle the fearsome ice at the entrance to the White Sea.

Up to mid-1919 *Mikula* sailed in Russia's northern waters under the French flag.[81] Records suggest that *Mikula* was the only icebreaker to participate in the final Allied evacuation from Archangel, with two departures from that port: on 2 July 1919, evacuating 11 officers and one other rank; and on 6 August 1919, carrying away two officers. In all probability, the ship ran out cargo and the equipment of the departing French forces.[82] One source suggests that on her final voyage from Russia, *Mikula* bore away a cargo of Russian

the Institute's publication No. 1 holds a record of these proceedings. I have not been able to obtain a copy of this issue.

[77] Kedrov, Za *Sovetskii...,* 114.

[78] T.W. Kemp, Rear Admiral, "5th Supplement" to *London Gazette,* 8 July 1920.

[79] RGAVMF, Fonds 129, Opis 1, delo 1, 271(verso). Russian naval records contain an inventory of all of *Mikula's* equipment and supplies; the inventory bears the stamp of the Engineer Captain, Bell Street, North Shields, 7 October 1918. These records were probably sent by Rear-Admiral Volkov, Russian Naval Agent in London, to the Naval ministry of the White Government in North Russia and, after that government's demise, fell into Soviet hands and ultimately made their way into naval archives.

[80] NAC, MG31 J18, Vol 3, File "Manuscript. Red Sun at Dawn. Chapters I-VÏÏ", 109, 110.

Zalesskii, *FlotRusskogo Severn...,* 149.

[82] HMSO, *Statement of Expenditure on Naval and Military Operations in Russia, From the Date of the Armistice to the 31" March, 1920.* (London, 1920, 44.

suede leather to France.[83] Although N.P. Zelenov, a White officer who eventually escaped from Bolshevik Russia, places *Mikula* in the area of Archangel in early 1920, in all likelihood his is a mistaken contention.[84] In August 1919 *Mikula* left Russia's waters for good, never to return there again.

Jane's Fighting Ships 1920 places *Mikula* at Cherbourg, indicating that the icebreaker intended to proceed to the Black Sea, where it was to join Baron Wrangel's military forces and operate along the coasts of the Crimea. The 1922 edition of *Jane's* puts *Mikula* in Bizerte, the Mediterranean port of French-ruled Tunisia, where the remnants of the Imperial Russian fleet were relocated after the fall of Baron Wrangel's government in 1921. Of all former Allied governments only the French gave the last ships of the former Imperial Russian Navy sanctuary, which would also prove to be the place where the last Russian naval vessels flying the flag of St. Andrew died.[85] It is unclear whether or *not Mikula* ever joined up with the Russian fleet at Bizerte.

A note from the files of Soviet Naval HQ, dated 4 September 1922, provides summary information on where ships of the former Imperial Russian Navy were then located. The Soviet government, as the de facto successor state to the former Empire, was pressing its claim to the ownership of these ships, and demanding their return to Russia. All were in French hands, most of them in Bizerte, with others scattered throughout other ports (Marseille, Toulon and Cherbourg). Among these ships *was Mikula,* identified as docked in Cherbourg, in "A" condition, recently out of the White Sea. The icebreaker's immediate past was summarized as follows:

> *Mikula* is an icebreaker of the White Sea ... It worked from the fall of 1918 (the beginning of the occupation of Archangel by the English and the Whites) along with other Russian and English icebreakers. On some kind of mission it was sent to England in 1919, where it remained until the cleansing of the

Andrienko, *Nevezuchii...,* 57.

[84] N.P. Zelenov, *Tragediia Severnoi Oblasti* [The Tragedy of the Northern Region], *mBelyi Sever* [The White North], ed. V.I. Goldin et al, Archangel, Issue Et, 230. Zelenov was in Archangel during the desperate evacuation of General Miller's White government from the city on 19 February 1920. Excoriating the General's cowardly and duplicitous flight, and his desertion of White officers in the field, as well as their families in Archangel, Zelenov suggests that a planned evacuation was possible with the ice breakers at hand; with *Kanada, Susanin, Nos. 6* and *9,* as well as *Mikula,* all who wished could have been got away from the city. Yet it seems unlikely that *Mikula* was still in the area, since many published archival documents dealing with the escape, and with the significance of icebreakers in Russia's north at that time, make no mention of *Mikula* at all.

[85] O. Parkes, and M. Prendergast, *{tés.) Jane's Fighting Ships 1920,* London, 1920, 570; O. Parkes, (ed.), *Jane's Fighting Ships 1922,* London, 1922,320. Various Soviet sources also suggest *thatMikula* was directed from France to Bizerte. See, for example, Ministry of Defence SSSR, *Korabli i vspomogatel 'nye suda...*, section on ledokoly [icebreakers].

> English and Whites from Archangel. In 1921, *[Mikula],* along with the ice breaker *Minin,* appeared in France, in Cherbourg ... In January-March of 1922, *[Minin* along with] *Mikula* were up for sale, in all likelihood being sold by the French government ... to Canada. Upon receiving news of the intended sale this April ... *Tsumor* [Central Maritime Administration] commenced action for the return of the icebreakers [to the Soviet Republic].[86]

The Russian note accurately reflected Canada's interest in acquiringMf£w/a. As early as 2 December 1920, Canada responded favourably to a French invitation to *insipectMikula.* The Canadian government recognized that title to the vessel was unclear; although the ship was in the hands of the French government, "ownership is claimed by both Russian parties" [the Soviet Republic and probably the Russian Committee in London representing the Whites]. Nonetheless, in a note to the Colonial Office, Canada indicated that it "would be glad to learn whether in event of purchase, French Government would be disposed to turn ship over to Canada."[87]

The acquisition of *Mikula* seemed a matter of some urgency for Canada, for on 11 January and 15 February 1921 Ottawa repeated requests to the Colonial Office to advance the purchase of the icebreaker. London finally responded on 24 February, indicating that the British Ambassador to France had been instructed to look into the matter, and to obtain the views of the French government regarding disposal of the ship, cautioning that the "position" was complicated by post-war claims against Soviet Russia for its renunciation of Tsarist debts. Hearing nothing for several months, Ottawa again requested clarification in early May; later in the month came a response that the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs was in the process of determining the terms and conditions under which France would release *Mikula.* London also passed on the French government's reply of 11 April 1921 to earlier British inquiries of 5 and 19 February 1921 regarding Canada's desire to purchase the icebreaker.[88]

The French note asserted that *Mikula* had in fact been purchased by the former Russian government, paid for in cash; that during the war *Mikula* had been constantly at the disposition of the Government of North Russia as long as that government had existed (far from the truth, given that from August 1918 the ice breaker had passed fully into the hands of the Allies and was run out as booty in September 1919 while the White Government would stand until February 1920); and then "it had been definitely brought to Cherbourg" (an evasive rendering). The French note treated *Mikula* as a commodity which could be perceived as a reparations credit, adding that the Inter-Allied accord of 1918 governing the disposition

[86] RGAVMF, Fonds 1, Opis 3,112, 113, 374.

[87] NAC, RG 25, Vol 1279, File 1443 "Ice Breaker *Mikula Selianinovich* 1920-1926"

[88] *Ibid.*

of stocks and goods of the Russian government allowed each country in which such assets were located to dispose of them independently. Thus, in accordance with these positions, the French government felt that it was "justified in taking all measures which it deemed opportune regarding the ice breaker *Mikula".* Once the French had indicated that they *treated Mikula* as their property, and hence were free to dispose of it, in the latter part of June Canada requested that the ship be docked and a date fixed so that Canadian officials could inspect the ice breaker. The French government fixed a price of £350,000 *îor Mikula,* also offering the *Minin* (the name mangled to *Minime),* and indicated that negotiations should proceed through the Russian Commission of Liquidation heaquartered in Paris.[89]

Upon hearing the price tags which France placed upon the two ice breakers, on 28 June 1921 E. Hawken, Assistant Deputy Minister of Marine and Fisheries, responded that "the government of Canada is not interested in the purchase of the Icebreakers *Mikula Selianinovitch* and *Minime* at even half of the prices named." At about this time, in a note of 17 August 1921, Soviet Russia registered a strong protest against the bruited sale of many formerly Russian vessels then held by the Allies. She publicized her claim to them, and indicated that, until such time as the issue of ownership had not been dealt with by agreement, Russia would continue to consider such vessels as her property in future, and that her actions would be so guided.[90]

When negotiations re-commenced, how they were conducted, the archival record does not say. *Mikula* was ultimately purchased for £95,000 by order-in-council, out of an appropriation approved for the purchase of a new ice breaker.[91] But on 12 May 1922 Mr. Berzin of the Russian Trade Delegation in London, making reference to the above-mentioned note, and observing that "towards the end of March last the Canadian Government took over from the French Government the Icebreaker *Mikula Selianinovitch,"* requested British authorities to inform Canada that "the government of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic would point out that the Icebreaker *Mikula Selianinovitch* is the property of the Russian Soviet Government and would, therefore, be glad to know what action the Canadian Government proposes to take in the matter." Hawken's reply was curt; on 17 August 1922 he informed Russia, through the Colonial Secretary, that "this ship has been purchased by the Canadian Government, from the French Government, and is now in a port in Canada." On 28 September the Russian Trade Delegation once again affirmed its claim to *Mikula;* and there the matter contesting ownership of the vessel with Soviet Russia ended.[92]

[90] *Ibid.*

[91] Appleton, "What's in a Name...," RG 12, Vol 3859, File "Appleton file 2," 2.

[92] NAC, RG 25, Vol 1279, File 1443 "Ice *Breaker Mikula Selianinovich* 1920-1926."However, in early 1926 France requested additional compensation from Canada. The purchase documents valued the ship at 3,228,000 francs, while Canada had actually paid only 2,936,000 francs. As well, perishables on board amounting to 32,600 francs had never been paid for. On this total difference of 432,000 francs, Canada owed France a 5%

The contract of sale of *Mikula* to the Canadian government was signed 3 June 1922; by 5 August *Mikula* was berthed in the port of Quebec, registered with the Quebec Agency of the Department of Marine and Fisheries. The Russian name was retained, and the icebreaker, along with *Lady Grey* and *Montcalm,* came to "constitute the St. Lawrence ice breaking fleet."[93] During her 15 years of Canadian service the ship was largely in the hands of two masters, Captains John Hearn (1924-1931) and Oscar Mercier (1932-1935). She was not the easiest of ships to handle:

> a coal-fired steamship and with [the] constant fluctuation of power required in icebreaking it was hard for the firemen to keep steam; one moment they would be shovelling like mad as the bridge rang down for full throttle, only to hear the roar of escaping steam a few minutes later as the engines were stopped and the safety valves lifted. To the toiling stokehold crew there was a more satisfactory ring to their own adopted name of *Mikula* 'Sonavabitch.'[94]

The nature of ice-breaking along the St. Lawrence and the various debates surrounding the efficacy of keeping a channel open in winter have been treated by others elsewhere - it is not my intention to discuss the issue here, other than note the contentiousness of the efficacy of ice-breaking in the 1920s. Many felt keeping a channel open as long as possible with winter's approach, and as early as possible with the coming of spring, relieved downstream communities, especially Montreal, of the threat of flooding and great destruction by both floodwaters and ice-shove. Others saw benefit in ice-bridges as they formed, easing their communications burden by providing ice roads. During the 1920s some felt that the work of the icebreakers was counter-productive, simply shifting trouble from one locale to another; others felt that the work was invaluable and suggested more effective ways to employ the ships (such as T. M. Kirkwood's recommendation that two channels be kept open, one hugging each bank).[95] While the debates went on, *Mikula,* paired up with *Lady Grey,* went about her task in breaking St. Lawrence River ice.

Mikula at times faced challenges as great in the St. Lawrence as she had faced in the White Sea. For example, in the very severe winter of 1923-1924 a huge ice-bridge formed at Cap Rouge, not more than six miles out of Quebec. In March 1924 *Mikula* and *Lady Grey* were ordered to break through the bridge. Both ships were disabled in their struggle with the

tax of 16,230 francs. Canada promised to study the French claim and, ultimately, rejected it on the grounds that the Department of Marine had purchased *Mikula* not from the French government, but from a broker and handler, Mr. J. Herbert Anderson, and that any additional claims had to be directed to him. France concurred.

[93] NAC, MG 26, II, Vol 129, 110042.

[94] Appleton, "What's in a Name... ", in RG 12, Vol 3859, File "Appleton file 2," 3.

[95] NAC, RG 42, Vol 374, File 22-5-305 *"Mikula* 1923-1928"; the "debate" suffuses the whole file.

ice formation, reported the St. John *Globe* of 12 March 1924, a discouraging development since they were "needed in the Saint Lawrence River to keep the river-way as it opens clear of drifting ice." Regarding this "engagement" with the ice, and *Mikula* in general, the newspaper went on as follows:

> The *Mikula,* which is the most powerful icebreaker in the world, was built by the British government for Russia, but was never paid for and was taken back. It weighs three thousand tons and is hulled in double steel with a three-foot space between each skin, it is a double-ender with trimming tanks both fore and aft and an arrangement by which three hundred tons of water can be transferred from end to end in twenty-five minutes. It is equipped with all the last minute word in ice-breaking appliances and has been deemed invulnerable, but was obliged to yield to the formidable front presented by the Cap Rouge ice barrier.[96]

Interesting to note, the newspaper erred in three of its significant assertions - in the claim that *Mikula* was the most powerful icebreaker in the world, that it had been built by the British government, and that Russia had never paid for the vessel.

Along with breaking ice, *Mikula* carried paying passengers and delivered cargo. In January-March 1930, during the deep winter period when river ice was too thick to break, *Mikula* worked in the estuary of the St. Lawrence, carrying cargo and passengers on the Quebec-Anticosti run, serving the ports of Tadousac, Bersimis, Franklin, Godbout, Trinity Bay, Pentecost, Shelter Bay, Clarke City, Seven Islands and Ellis Bay, and putting in at North Sydney as well.[97] In keeping with the spirit of the times, crewing *Mikula* was a patronage operation. Writing on 30 October 1929 to the Deputy Minister of Marine and Fisheries, C.G. Powers noted that, given the difficult economic times, all efforts should be made to recruit men from Quebec City proper, rather than hire men from rural districts. *Mikula's* crew list of 1928, giving the names and positions of 81 men, identifies constituencies from whence drawn, and names the MPs recommending appointment. Save for one man from Newfoundland, all were from Quebec ridings.[98]

"The *Mikula* was a successful ship and, with the addition of *Saurel* in 1929 and *N. B. McLean* in 1930 the St. Lawrence was well served. But the years were beginning to tell on *Mikula* and on 20 April 1937 she was sold."[99] However, even the final sale *of Mikula* was attended by controversy - the ship did not steam away quietly into the night. Towards the end

[96] NAC, RG 42, Vol 374, File 22-5-305 *"Mikula* 1923-1928", 22.

[97] NAC, RG 42, Vol 1058, File 100-M31 *"Mikula* - Work and Accounts 1925-1930."

[98] NAC, RG 42, Vol 1058, File 100-M22 vol.4 *"Mikula* - Crewing 1929."

[99] *Ibid.,* **3.**

of 1936 the federal government put the icebreaker, which had been decommissioned in 1935, up for sale. The sale was advertised in Europe but brought no takers. There was interest in North America and bids began to come in. As the world market for scrap metal heated up in 1937, *Mikula's* potential value increased; authorization for her disposal was granted 23 February 1937. The government, after another round of advertising, announced that bidding would close at 12:00 p.m. on 30 March 1937.[100]

Probable behind-the-scenes dealings regarding *Mikula's* sale produced Order-in-Council P.C. 798, dated 15 April 1937, which rejected all tenders received on 30 March and recommended the sale of *Mikula* to the Maritime Navigation Company, which offered $5 0,000 for the ship on 10 April, well past the end-March deadline.[101] There is some murkiness here. Just before Cabinet approved P.C. 798, rejecting all bids tendered by the official closing date, Mr. King received a letter from A.H. Turner, Managing Director of Turner & Hickman Limited, representing Amott and Brown, Shopbreakers of Glasgow, in which he protested "perceived irregularities" in the sale of the icebreaker.[102] The letter, written on 9 April, led to an instantaneous result. On 10 April King's secretary typed up the following note; "on instructions of Mr. King I telephoned to Mr. Turner to explain difficulty in way of making arrangement for consideration before Wednesday. Mr. Turner stated that he had since seen Mr. Howe, and the matter now satisfactorily adjusted". An attached codicil indicates that this note was "seen by Mr. King on April 13th-."[103] Some days later Cabinet approved the sale of *Mikula* to Maritime Navigation, purchasing the ice breaker, as on the earlier attempt, on

[100] NAC, RG 12, Vol 400, File 9105-2 "Sale *of Mikula",* 1-33. W.W. Ogilvie of New York offered $10,000, later increasing its bid to $15,000, in September 1936; Manseau Shipyards of Sorel came in at $22,500 in January 1937; the Maritime Navigation Company, in February 1937 offered $30,000, followed by Magaree Steamship Company of Nova Scotia in the same month, offering $40,000.

[101] *Ibid.,34-3S.*

[102] NAC, MG 26 J1, Vol 243, 209253,209256. In this letter of 9 April, Turner pointed out *that Mikula* had much earlier been offered to Amott and Brown by Maritime Navigation Company of Liverpool, Nova Scotia, which had bought the ship from the Minister of Transport, Mr. Howe, "by private sale...which was subsequently not completed". Turner had submitted his sealed tender and, to the best of his knowledge, had come in with the best offer, but word was out that now the Canadian government intended to cancel the sale, and offer *Mikula* for breaking up only in Canada. He protested the impropriety of such a move, of allowing foreign bidders to undergo the expense of tendering and then to be arbitrarily cut out of the process. Turner added that the firm he represented had bid on craft from many governments of Europe and from the British Admiralty, and never had the "trouble and confusion such as we have experienced in the present instance". He declared himself "completely baffled by the mystery and the secrecy surrounding the sale by tender of the steamer *Mikula".* With a lightly-veiled threat to take the matter up with the Dominion Secretary on his return to Britain and to approach Lord Tweedsmuir, the Governor-General, Mr. Turner appealed to Prime Minister King "as a just and fair man" to avert the consequences of impropriety, as well as the unfavourable "impression such a course would have upon shipping men in Great Britain [which] would be highly detrimental to Canadian prestige in the shipping markets of the United Kingdom."

[103] ***Bld., 209254***

behalf of Mr. Turner's clients, Arnott and Brown of Glasgow.

Over the next several weeks, *Mikula* was inspected for seaworthiness, stripped of various equipment excluded from the sale (such as her wireless), exempted from certain safety requirements for an Atlantic crossing (wireless, safety equipment, lifeboats of a Class I standard), and fitted with the barest furnishings for a skeleton crew of 35 (her usual complement was in the area of 100 men). The wireless exemption delayed *Mikula's* departure for some time, since this exemption required an Order-in-Council. On 2 May, *Mikula* departed Quebec, to coal at Sydney; on 5 May she received her wireless exemption for "one voyage Sydney to Glasgow."[104]

Shortly afterwards *Mikula,* as the vessel had done twenty-one years earlier in late 1916, sailed for Europe once again. Unlike the first easting, though, from this one there would be no return. Rumours were heard from time to time that *Mikula,* in defiance of years and fate, had "turned up once more in Russia in her hour of need"[105] during the Second World War - but those were rumours only, perhaps initiated and perpetuated by men who had served aboard her, who could not let the storied icebreaker die.

Mikula's Specifications

Upon registry in the Russian naval fleet, the ship's specifications were set as follows:

Length-292' Beam-57'6"
Displacement - 5,000 tons Ice Belt - 1 and 1/16"
Width of Ice Belt - 15' 6" Depth of Hold - 32' 0"
Draught - 19' 3" [19' 6"] Draught (full load) - 22' 6"
Screws - 2 Horsepower - 8,000
Speed - 17 'miles' Range - 4,000 to 6,600 nautical miles
Coal Capacity - 1,400 tons (10 days at full speed)
Boilers - 6, cylindrical, 4 ordinary, 2 reciprocating [also given as 8, in a 2,4,2 arrangement]
Water for Boilers - 1241 tons in ballast
Armament - two 76 caliber and two 120 caliber guns, and 4 machine guns
Radio-Telegraph - 2.5 kilowatts Searchlights - 2 75,000 candlepower
Provisions: Food - sufficient for 2 months, Potable Water - 103 tons
Quarters: Officers - 12 permanent, 8 temporary cots, at stern on main deck; Crew - 69 bunks in double tier, 46 hammocks, in bow on main deck
Passengers: 1st - 30 on main deck, 2nd - 10 in bow on lower deck, 3rd - 50 cots on lower deck
Auxiliary boats: Steam cutter - 1, Cutter - 1 of 30' length, Motorized lifeboat - 1 of 30' length
Ice Boats - 2
Loading and Towing Apparatus: 4 one-ton capacity corner steam cranes, 2 stern capstans, 1 self-releasing towing winch

104 NAC, RG 12, Vol 1400, File 9105-2 "Sale of *Mikula",* pp 38-65.

105 Appleton, "What's in a Name... ", in RG 12, Vol 3859, File "Appleton file 2", p 4.