

Ahoy! The British land in St. Petersburg

By VANESSA WILLIAMS
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The thick white fog that smothered St. Petersburg most of Thursday morning was threatening, but it didn't scare the Royal British Navy from completing its mission.

The mission was to deliver 180 weary seamen to a two-week holiday vacation in St. Petersburg. But as the 350-foot frigate approached the shipping channel Thursday morning, Commander A.J. Bolingbroke said, the local pilots association said the weather was too poor for navigation and would not send a pilot to guide the ship through.

"But we took ourselves down (the channel) with our own navigator," Bolingbroke said, beaming. "We were determined to get here."

The *Ambuscade* guided into the Port of St. Petersburg with royal splendor with a gun salute that unfortunately was not heard by about 100 people waiting on the dock.

Among those gazing up at the towering gray vessel was Zita Hocut, herself a former Navy dental technician. Mrs. Hocut, who now lives in Largo, served at the Jacksonville Naval Air Station during the Korean War.

"It's beautiful," she said of the *Ambuscade*. "It makes you get a lump in your throat. It's a different Navy, but still . . ."

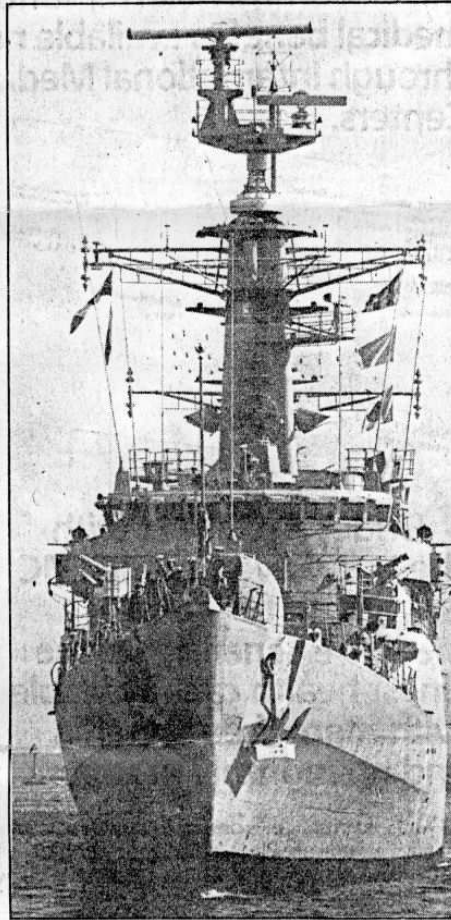
And St. Petersburg is a lot different from many of the exotic ports that the *Ambuscade* and other British ships have visited. But, according to Bolingbroke and his men, it is a favorite of the British Navy.

"St. Petersburg has a strong reputation," Bolingbroke said, adding that it was chosen over Fort Lauderdale and New Orleans as this year's holiday stopover.

During a reception Thursday sponsored by the St. Petersburg U.S. Naval Reserve Center, most crew members agreed with their commander, saying that St. Petersburg has a reputation in the British Navy as being particularly hospitable.

Chris Miles, 26, who has been in the Royal Navy five years, said the crew from last year's visiting British ship, the *Tartar*, told him that St. Petersburg "was terrific." Miles' wife was due to fly in Thursday afternoon to join him for the holidays.

Michael Thomas, a weapons mechanic, said he visited St. Petersburg two years ago while stationed on the British ship *Hydra*. But he didn't get to see much of St. Petersburg because a few days after arrival he flew to Baltimore, to visit relatives. "It's a shame I had to fly away," Thomas said. This



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The British warship *Ambuscade* pulls into port.



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That British touch The Union Jack flies over the Port of St. Petersburg as the British frigate *Ambuscade* arrived Thursday for a two-week holiday stay. Story, another photo — 9-B.

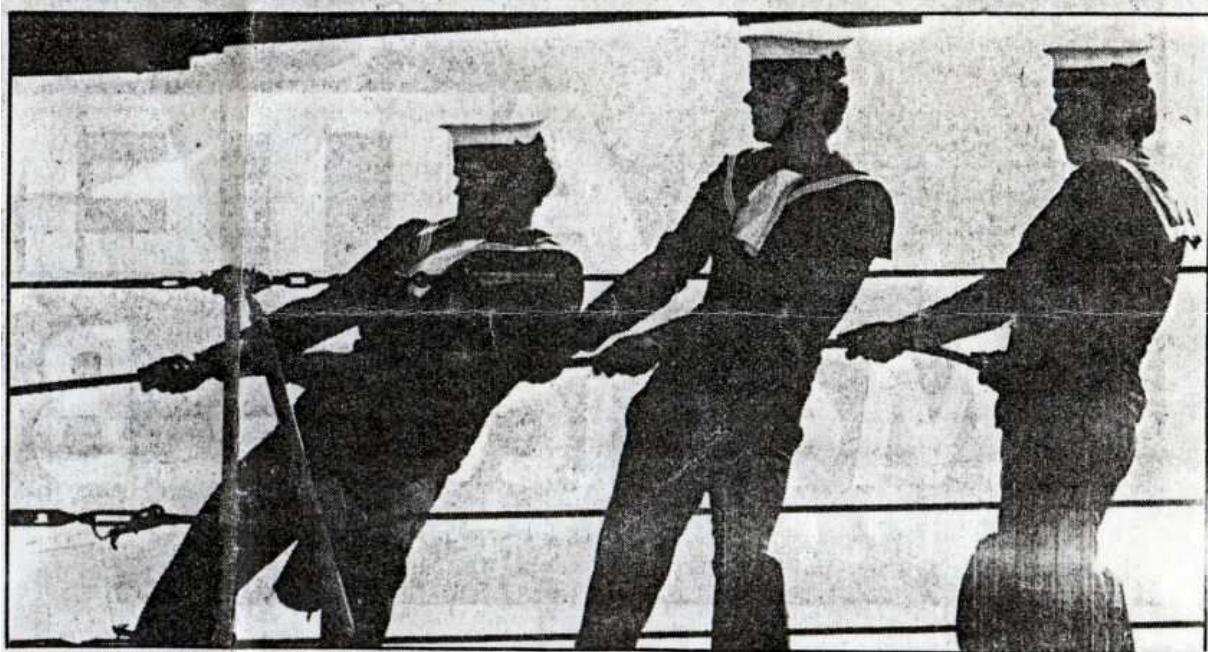
year he plans to stay in the city the entire two weeks.

Last year's annual visit by the British Navy was marred by the death of *Tartar* crew member Michael Bacon. The 23-year-old sailor was struck by a car early New Year's Eve Day.

The *Ambuscade* saw action in last year's British invasion of the Falkland Islands. It is equipped with a 4.5-inch gun, 20mm guns, two computerized fire control missiles and two com-

puter-controlled triple torpedo tubes for launching anti-submarine torpedoes. The ship also carries a Lynx helicopter capable of carrying anti-submarine torpedoes and air-to-ground missiles.

In addition to sightseeing, the British sailors have received several invitations to local events. To return the favor, the commander said, the ship will be open to the public from 4:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Dec. 28 to Dec. 31.



The British sailors say St. Petersburg is one of their most favored destinations.