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Title: The Frigate Kreiser Visits California, 1823-4.

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Dmitry Zavalishin: The Frigate Kreiser visits California, 1823-4, excerpt from: "The Voyage Round the World of the Frigate Kreiser during the Years 1822-1825, under the command of Mikhail Petrovich Lazarev," by Dmitry I. Zavalishin (1804-92). Originally published as "Krugosvietnoe plavanie fregate Kreiser v 1822-1825 gg pod komandoiu Mikhaila Petrovicha Lazareva (Okonchanie)," in Drevniaia i Staraia Rossiia (1877), bk 11, pp. 210-17 (from the Conclusion, pt. VII of the article). Translated by Professor Stephen Watrous, Sonoma State University, Department of History.

The passage from Sitka to California was very memorable for both ships, the Kreiser as well as the Ladoga, but it was especially memorable for me, due to two circumstances of opposite nature. While commanding the watch during a very fierce storm, which caught us in a very dangerous place at the Sitka outlet, I picked up a bad cold and came down with a severe fever, but was awarded in a very complimentary remark by Lazarev for the instructions I gave at a very critical time.

We had barely succeeded in getting out of Sitka Bay when the wind's increasing intensity, the frequent attacks of squalls, and the falling of the mercury in the barometer served as unquestionable signs of an approaching storm. All precautions were taken, of course, but in spite of this, at twelve o'clock a sail began to tear. My watch ended at midnight, and I was extremely fatigued by the incessantly tense activity during the course of a long watch (from 6:00 p.m. to midnight), but at this critical moment such a continuity of orders was needed that it was impossible to lose touch with events for even a few minutes, in order to explain the situation of affairs on the frigate to the lieutenant replacing me and to hand over the watch to him. This is why I continued in command, [210b] though the period of my watch had ended quite some time earlier. All the officers and the entire crew were already on deck much later than midnight, and they took their places as usually follows during emergency work, when the command belongs to the senior lieutenant, but here there was no time to consider ranks. The officers senior to me assiduously carried out my orders and respected me for them, as the wind was so furious that a human voice could not be heard at even the closest distance, and all orders had to be given either by sending messengers or by reporting everything that had happened to those who came in person. Lazarev was standing beside me, and when on occasion I bent over to his ear for a second to tell him about the dispatches I had received and the orders I had given, he repeated from time to time: "Good, right, very well." At the same time the Ladoga let us know by signals that all its straight sails were torn. The signals were given by means of false fires; the sounds of cannon could not even be heard.

What an awful night it was! We were continually drenched by the crests of waves unleashed by the wind: they covered the rigging (the ropes) [211a] with ice, and to steer we had to make incredible efforts to hold the frigate in the proper direction

and not to let a wave, striking from the side, pour onto the deck, and thereby wash people away with it. We sprinkled sand on the deck, but even then, walking was impossible without holding onto the ropes drawn out along the way; each moment we had to look to see if the ropes that held the gun mountings and the spare masts and spare stationary were weakening, for otherwise, with these things torn away, a great calamity might occur, as examples of this unfortunately did happen. The danger from the storm was yet increased by the fact that we were very close to shore; this added a lot of work, since each time a sail was torn we had to untie it immediately and tie on a new one, which was a terribly difficult job amidst a wind that ripped everything away from one's hands; but to leave torn sails without replacing them with new ones was impossible, for if we should by chance be unable to steer the ship for even the briefest moment, it then could easily be driven ashore or upon rocky shoals and smashed; and a shipwreck here was more dangerous than anywhere else, for even in the event that people were saved, they could be exterminated by the wild and savage Kolosh. About two o'clock at night we stopped seeing even the answer signals of the Ladoga; it was clear that we had separated. Even under the best of circumstances the Ladoga had constantly lagged behind, and now, of course, it could have still less time to hold its own with the frigate; but to wait for it, by turning into the wind, was now impossible.

Finally, at about three o'clock, Lazarev, who was still standing nearby, said: "Well, Dmitry Irinarkhovich, thank God we've passed the dangerous part; you can leave the watch now and go get some rest." At these words, which ended the moral tension that had supported me in physical courage up to that minute, I suddenly fainted and would have fallen onto [211b] the deck if Lazarev had not supported me. I was carried to a cabin and came down with a strong fever. Having a very healthy constitution, which endured both fever and cold equally well, I had always stood on watch in dry weather in just a full-dress coat, and having spent nine hours, of course, on deck in such light clothing during the gale, I caught a bad cold. Until then I had never been sick, and for that reason my strong constitution might have triumphed even on this occasion had I rested a few days, but when, after being put to bed by the doctor, I warmed up and went to sleep, it seemed to me that I felt so much better that I could perform my duties. As someone had replaced me on watch, and as my comrades the watch lieutenants were supposed to take over the watch in threes just when it was difficult under the circumstances obtaining, I persisted in keeping the watch for two days, from which I exhausted myself for good; after this crisis, however, I quickly recovered nine days later.

On December 1, we cast anchor in San Francisco Bay, not far from the presidio (or fortification) of the same name; we found the sloop Apollon and two ships of the Russian-American Company at a roadstead, and in a few hours the Ladoga reached the roadstead too. In such fashion were the naval forces belonging to Russia assembled in San Francisco Bay, and, for that time,

they were quite significant--for even the ships of the Russian-American Company had cannon, whereas England and the United States did not have a single ship to represent their naval strength. Russia in fact ruled over the North Pacific Ocean at that time, but the moment had already slipped past in which any benefit for ourselves could have been gained from this situation.

In view of the fact that I was still not completely in good health, and that the need to take up the question of supplying wheat and providing the frigate with fresh produce had meanwhile arisen, a room for me was set aside the next day in the house of the governor, who had since become the president of the province and had moved to Monterey. As there were neither window frames, wooden floors, nor stoves in these houses, our joiners and carpenters consequently made the window frames and floors, but instead of a stove a spare copper fireplace from the frigate was set up. All of this very much pleased the aristocracy of San Francisco, and my room became a gathering place for the ladies and young women of the presidio, who rather got in my way and caused me no little constraint.

In my articles printed in the Russian Herald, "Recollections of California" and "The Fort Ross Question," I already mentioned much that related to the political situation and to social life in California, and for this reason I intend to limit myself here to giving chiefly an account just of the circumstances that dealt immediately with the frigate Kreiser.

It was extremely difficult to have any kind of dealings then in California, for everything was still in a primitive state there, not only among the Indians, but also among the Spanish, who ruled there. With an abundance of wheat, it was impossible to deliver flour, except in such quantities that allowed fresh bread to be baked at least for the crew; it was well that I was still supplied with hand mill-stones from Russia, namely so that grain could be ground on board the frigate, too. The Spanish had neither water mills, wind mills, nor horse or hand-powered mills, and each household prepared for itself a small amount of flour into unleavened cakes, grinding the grain with a stone on a slab, just as we spread paints.

The means of transporting the purchased wheat were also extremely difficult. Though a portion of it was bought at the nearest mission, the fields belonging to it and the farmsteads where the granaries were lay on the other side of the bay, and if something had to be transported overland, then one had to travel over a hundred versts around the whole bay, and in the absence of highways and wagons, the only way left was to make the haul by pack loads on horses. Meanwhile, for transportation on water, which was much closer and more convenient, the Spanish had only clumsy barges of the most primitive construction, which could

*More properly: "California in 1824," Russkii Viestnik, no. 11, 1865.

scarcely move, and in such fashion on every trip back and forth three or four times as much time had to be spent as on a good longboat; but we could not use our own longboat for transporting wheat, as it was constantly employed at other jobs for the frigate. Nor did the Indians have any means of transport, such as could be found among the Aleuts and Kolosh at Sitka, for example. We never even saw any navigation along the rivers, not to mention in the sea, in such a primitive state, and this is explained perhaps by the generally peaceful condition of San Francisco Bay, which is shut off on all sides, thus affording no need to struggle with the aquatic element.

We saw various savages in diverse situations, and all those who had to strain their mental capacities and their energy in struggling with the stormy element knew how to devise various kinds of ships, in accordance with local conditions. The Kolosh had baty, which were able to accommodate a large number of people even in competitions with our row boats, and which in speed were second to none of our best gigs and kayaks; the Aleuts had excellent leather kayaks and canoes which were equally capable of navigating the sea and of crossing the smallest places; the inhabitants of islands in the Pacific Ocean had dug-outs so skillfully fashioned that they could not tip over; to achieve this, they fastened at a certain distance from the boat a light tree onto the ends of squared beams which were placed across the boat and reinforced; this would not permit the boat to tip over on the tree's side, because along the length of the squared beams, this tree, serving as a lever at the extremity and with all its lightness, provided enough weight to keep the boat in balance. In transporting [213a] large loads they joined two boats and laid out a common deck. But the Indians in California had not devised anything better than tying two bundles of reeds and fastening them together at the ends, and in drawing the bundles apart in the middle they climbed in between and floated in such a way that they submerged half the body in the water and instead of oars used some kind of thick branch.

The slowness in delivering wheat produced great inconvenience for us. We had to return to Sitka by March, when several thousand savages gathered there for the herring catch, and this always presented no little danger for the colony; yet we could not make a final trans-shipment until all the necessary amount of wheat had been delivered to the frigate.

Regarding meat food there was no difficulty; everything was plentiful and cheap. For a live steer we paid two Spanish piastres; and this was actually for the work of catching him and delivering him to the place where we had built our workshops; the owner of the steer claimed only the hide for profit, since leather then comprised the only object of export from California besides wheat. Each day we made a double portion of fresh meat for the ship's crew, and besides this, prepared a large amount of salt beef for the immediate use in Sitka, so as to save for the return trip to Russia the salt beef that was taken from Russia and prepared by a special method such that it could be preserved

for three years; we also took part of the Russian salt beef from the sloops Apollon and Ladoga, which, it turned out, had a considerable supply of it. As for wildfowl, we did not have to buy it, but hunted it ourselves; besides the officers' daily hunting expeditions, each day we sent ashore a very skilled rifleman from among the sailors, whom we called our huntsman; he was given two assistants, and every day they brought back a whole load of very diverse wild game--geese, ducks, snipe, partridge, and rabbits. To have some conception of [213b] the abundance of game, the following anecdote can be cited: one of the officers from the sloop Apollon, M.K. Kuechelbacker, a very kind and lenient man, took his servant, who was a great rogue, hunting with him, and who, of course, had to carry everything that his master shot. After a short time, the servant, seeing that he already had to carry a dozen and a half geese, while his master just kept on shooting, suddenly fell to the ground and began to groan, saying that he was forced to stumble and could go no further due to the pain in his leg. The good gentleman undertook to carry the bag himself, and ordered him to walk slowly, supported by a staff, which he broke off from amongst the bushes for him. Of course, a medical assistant, after examining the servant's leg, did not find a trace of injury, but his master did not want to believe this and contended that truly he had somehow walked awkwardly and had stretched a tendon.

There was also plenty of fresh butter and milk, which especially pleased those officers who liked to drink tea and coffee with milk, and for whom a lack of milk constituted a great deprivation. Indeed, we tried three times to bring cows onto the frigate, and each time the first prolonged storm or strong pitching occurred we lost them. Yet in Sitka there was no milk either, due to the impossibility of the residents' maintaining cows--in the absence of pastures, so that after Tasmania the frigate could enjoy milk for the first time only in California. Naturally, these enthusiasts tried to substitute condensed milk or powdered dry milk for fresh milk, but all of this was unsatisfactory and very expensive. In California, however, milk was the usual beverage, and, conforming to the nature of the grasses, it was of an excellent quality; only cream could not be obtained from the inhabitants, who did not use it, and we had to insist upon getting it.

As a result of our wheat purchases, we had to travel all over the northern part of Upper California, at first on horseback--for the purchases, and then by water--transporting them afterward; in such a way I visited all the places later made famous by the discovery of gold. I [214a] visited Missions San Rafael and San Francisco Solano, the only ones established on the northern shore of San Francisco Bay, and the latter namely with the aim of restraining the expansion of the Russian colony of Ross, which I also visited on this occasion; I was at San Pablo and on the banks of the Sacramento River, where I proposed that new Russian colonies be established (and here too the first gold was found); more than once was I at San Jose and Santa Clara, and I passed over an abandoned but direct route to Santa Cruz, which

was very difficult and dangerous; and I was in Mariposa and in the ravines of Calaveras. I examined deserted silver mines and can say that after the discovery of gold, when people began to write a lot about California, I for a long time did not come across the name of a single place where my feet had not touched. I happened to make over 150 versts in 24 hours on horseback, and on one excursion I rode 600 versts in four days."

While I had to spend so much time travelling, my comrades were not without entertainments, especially while all the ships were still at San Francisco, and on holiday occasions there was no lack of them, since all the holidays were repeated twice, not only because the Russians reckoned by the Old Style, and the Spanish by the New, but also because the Spanish had come to America from the east, and we from the west, and consequently we had a day's difference between ourselves, so that when they still had Saturday, it was already Sunday for us, and our Monday was still only Sunday for the Spanish. However, it must be said that it was our officers who provided the chief resources for festivities, even when on the Spaniards' shoreline; it was always our music, our wine and dessert, and our dinnerware, servants, and cooks; the Spanish supplied only the location and simple provisions, which were not much, and they invited female company. It should be added, moreover, that the officers preferred such parties on the shoreline because it was very troublesome to arrange frequent festivities on board ship, with the need to bring guests, and especially the ladies, on and off in our rowboats.

The sloops Apollon and Ladoga, which had called at San Francisco only to let their crews rest and refresh themselves, were, of course, prepared to leave sooner, and on January 12, 1824 they set off on the return trip to Russia. In connection with this I cannot but mention the noble and considerate deeds rendered by officers of the frigate. Knowing that former senior lieutenant K--, who had been drafted off the frigate, would come to bid a touching farewell to the frigate officers in full view of the crew, which had demanded his removal, everybody came to say good-bye to him, though there was hardly anyone whom he had not strongly irritated in his time. No one blamed himself personally or directly for clashing with him, since people avoided having anything to do with him altogether, but he found the means to provoke run-ins with us by various roundabout ways. It is true that he never dared treat me roughly or interfere with my orders, knowing that I reported to Lazarev each day and would not fail to announce my displeasure openly. But I often had to intercede for junior officers and for my own subordinates, and for this reason was also frequently at loggerheads with him.

"The horses in California, of Andalusian breed, which comes of course from the Arabian, were excellent. In riding around the Spanish took three or four times as many horses as there were riders, so that frequent changes could be made.

To go into a detailed description of California now, after what has happened and has been discovered there recently, would in the end be superfluous, but it must be said that even then California's chief merit and importance was already fully known and officially announced many times. The mining of metallic riches has its limits, and we see that not even thirty years have passed since the discovery of gold (the existence of which, however, was well known there long beforehand) before the extraction of it significantly decreased, and other countries far away have already surpassed California in quantity and value of metals extracted; but the excellent climate, the rich soil, and the fine location on the Pacific Ocean, with one of the best ports in the world, constitute immutable and inalienable advantages that California possesses, which naturally resulted in the desire to expand our colony of Ross at least to the northern shore of San Francisco Bay and to the Sacramento River, and to such an extent this was still possible even at that time. Thus, with such an extension of our colony in mind, I profited by my official trips around California, so as to undertake all possible investigations and to gather the necessary information for attaining the above-mentioned objective. It is well known that subsequently the legend, preserved at Ross settlement, of the places examined on the Sacramento River gave cause for the governor of Ross colony, Mr. Rotchev, who knew these stories, to point out places along the Sacramento River to the Swiss immigrant, Sutter, as being suitable for founding an agricultural settlement, and that it was namely there that with the construction of a water-mill the first signs of gold were found. But that the existence of gold was known earlier, and even secretly mined in California, I have shown in my article, which comprises my recollections of California [see Russkii Viestnik, November 1865, "California in 1824"]; security alone was not provided, nor were there enough hands to exploit it; and the Franciscan friars, who predominated in California, did not admit foreigners, fearing too large an influx of them, and consequently the loss of their power.

This fear was also the chief reason why they gave up working the silver mines too, which was begun under the Spanish government and given up after Mexico fell away from Spain, a time when California was completely defenseless, as was proven by the attack of a single freebooter, who sacked Monterey. The opinion was even held that the Jesuits, who owned the missions before the Franciscan friars, secretly mined gold--which explained the wealth of their churches, and which, due to the absence of trade and of opportunities of gaining money for other products of the country, was otherwise inexplicable.

It is well known that now the value of agricultural products in California has long exceeded the value of gold extracted there, and such a turn could always have been foreseen, because even in our time the rich productivity of the soil in California was already an incontrovertible fact, which was more clearly evident than the friars' imperfect means of cultivating the land might indicate. At Mission San Francisco Solano I myself saw

that in place of harrows they dragged wood cut from bay trees through fields. But why not? Wheat gave a yield of ten-fold, barley twenty-fold, and corn 120-fold. This is why, when our government declined to accept the solicitations that Ross colony expand, the Russian-American Company wanted to assume responsibility on its own for the matter, and since my assistance in this was presupposed, I advised in a memorandum given to the government then that all efforts be turned to agriculture. At the same time I cautioned against the aspirations of certain directors [of the Russian-American Company] to rush right into the search for precious metals (the attractiveness of which came from the knowledge that silver was then being extracted there), since this would easily draw even in our time a crowd of adventurers all rushing in, and there would be insufficient means of restraining them; the development of agriculture, however, would provide safer and more reliable advantages. Even at that time bread was needed everywhere, but the production of it was still insufficient in California itself, and there were no commercial ships there to transport it. However, something could be said for stock-raising in California then; the herds were so large that the owners did not know how many there were, and they determined if one or another steer belonged to a herd by the place where he was grazed. They were not at all acquainted with dairy farming, however, and they maintained only as many cows as were needed for milk in domestic use.

[215a] After Mexico's declaration of independence California also became independent of Spain, but the administrative personnel remained the same. And when, after the overthrow of the ephemeral Emperor Augustin (Iturbide), Mexico became a federative republic, the entire changeover in California consisted of the former governor, Don Luis Arguello, being renamed president of the province of Upper, or New, California (California Alta e Nueva). To the friars alone, as heads of the missions, the changeover was painful in that with the dependence on Spain cut off, the funds from there also ceased; they still had to maintain on their own account soldiers for defense, who had also stopped receiving wages from Spain. This, however, forced the friars to engage somewhat more in agriculture as a chief source of income, and to relax the overly frequent religious exercise of the Indians. The arrival of our frigate and of the two ships of the Russian-American Company to purchase wheat provided the missionaries with an unexpected income, since if meat was very cheap, then wheat--in view of the dire need of it that we and the colonies had--was sold by the missionaries at a very high price: around four paper rubles per pood. The wheat shortage, besides the small production of it in general, occurred at that time partly as a result of its export to Peru, for which a small American cutter was used. Most of all, the purchase of grain at such a price set us back because payment was demanded in a large quantity of hard cash, whereas the Russian-American Company bought part of its cargo by means of merchandise, and if it paid in cash, then it quickly gained it back in compensation, because with the abundance of money that appeared amidst everybody, with the payment of salaries to everyone, and with the

liberality of our officers, the Company sold the entire amount of goods it had brought along.

Two places were set aside for the frigate for the execution of jobs: one of them opposite the frigate's mooring, where workshops were set up and the chronometers were checked over, and the other one along the northern side of San Francisco Bay, where we chopped firewood, burned charcoal, [216b] tied brooms, and did a general laundering of clothes.

At the end of all these tasks the sailors needed to be given a rest, so as to prepare them for the tedious stay at Sitka for a whole year or more, perhaps, if replacements were not sent, or if in case no mail came from Okhotsk and the instructions for returning home did not arrive--even without waiting for replacements. An enormous number of horses and the low cost of renting them in San Francisco gave the sailors an opportunity to try out an unknown or long-forgotten pleasure--riding on horseback. The Spaniard will not take one step on foot, and once seated on a horse he does not willingly dismount from it, such that on occasion he even enters a room (usually through high doors) to ask about something. For this reason each Spaniard at the presidio has a good many horses attached to his house, which he rotates within his own herd. Day and night all the officers always had saddled horses ready on the wharf, besides a few more especially for the errand boys. For the sailors, however, the chief pleasure consisted not of riding itself, but of the various adventures which accompanied it and which served as a source of gaiety and never-ending stories.

Before our departure we were visited by both the president of the province and by the superior of the missionaries, the Padre Presidente, as they called him. The visit of the latter caused me a lot of trouble. Our priest had to talk with him, of course; but he was an ignorant man who had served among the Cossack lieutenants of the Don Army, and who had preserved an old love for horses, but was not at all versed in theology, and I, against my will, served as intermediary between them in their conversations. Such was my difficulty when the Padre Presidente began to address our priest with questions about the Greek-Russian Church, about dogma, rituals, and the status of the clergy, and about the morals of the people, while our priest all the while just asked him about horses and everything related to them. To satisfy both of them I had to make up questions and answers for each. The sailors too all but got us into difficulty. They set up a theatrical presentation for the president of the province, but they began to put on a very disgusting play where the characters were a priest and a deacon, who uttered a very indecent passage. It was well that our doctor guessed what was up and told the Padre Presidente that this was a medieval mystery play, but of course we ended the play at the first act.

Naturally, the excitement which the presence of our ships, and especially the frigate with its large number of officers and

its music, brought to the little community of San Franciscans made it very difficult for them to part with us. The constant enjoyments and advantages which we provided for them and the liberality of the officers, who rewarded even the most insignificant service, made us at all times and places the most desired guests among the Spanish. For this reason it is not surprising that they saw us off with unfeigned tears and later recollected all this in letters. We were no less loved by the Indians--for our kind treatment of them, for the gifts that we gave their children, and for interceding to save them from punishments--and they long dreamt of our coming to liberate them from Spanish power. The chief of one independent tribe, who gave me a "chief's belt," a symbol of his dignity, said that if we would expand our colony, albeit even to the north, he would then settle with his entire tribe on our territory. Moreover, the brigand Pomponio left me alone, despite the fact that an important Spaniard whom he hated was accompanying me, while twice we found ourselves in a very dangerous place within sight of the hidden band of this brave Indian.

It is not without regret that we left California, where we had found such a cordial welcome and respite, along with entertainment and an abundance of all that we needed. After we had celebrated Christmas and the New Year twice--according to both the Russian and the Catholic reckoning, [217b] and after the inhabitants had wished us a sincere bon voyage and a return to them [some day], we left San Francisco Bay and for a long time could see through our spyglasses all the people whom we knew, assembled on the southern promontory of the entrance to the Bay to see us off as far as possible. Our return passage to Sitka was fully satisfactory and presented nothing noteworthy. We arrived at New Archangel at a very urgent moment, when the Kolosh were beginning to gather for the herring catch, and almost immediately after our arrival an event occurred which fully demonstrated the reality of the danger posed by the assemblage of a great number of savages and the fact that we could not trust them very much.