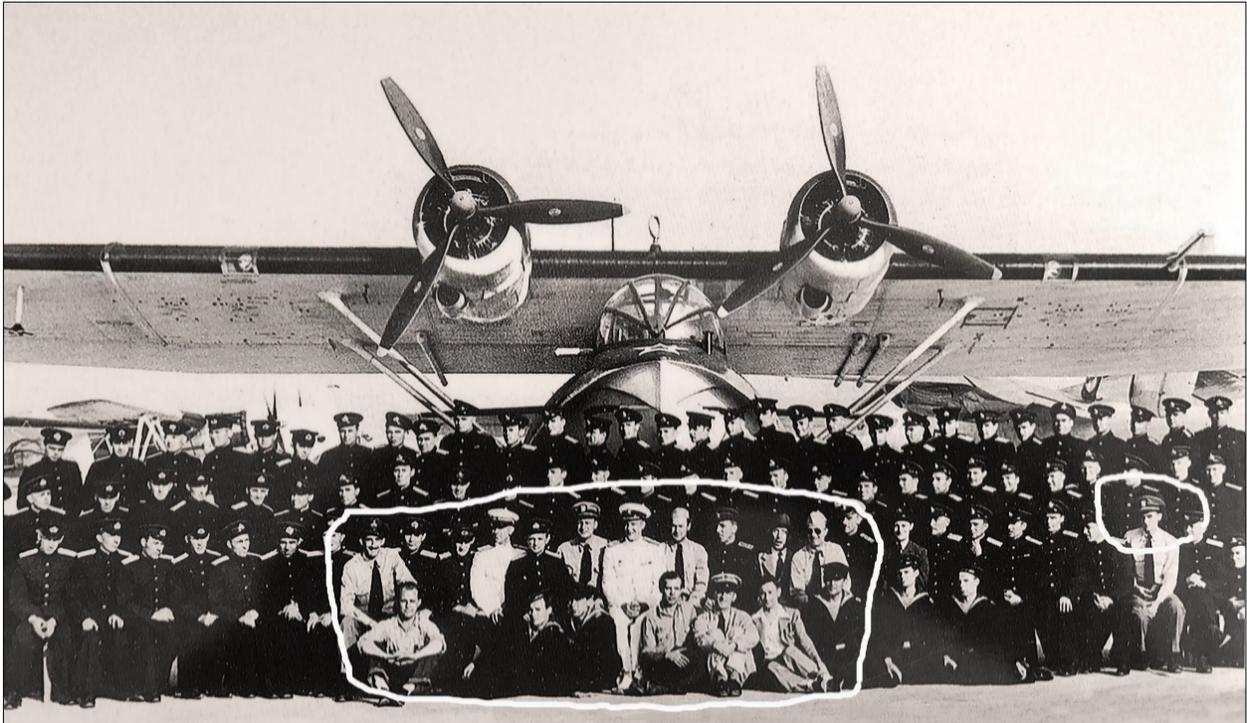


Contact:
Mary Ann Crisci
maryanncrisci@gmail.com
760.201.5154

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

After 71 years, the story of Roosevelt and Stalin's top-secret mission in America is told



March 1943. The first Soviet Zebras and their American training counterparts on tarmac in Elizabeth City, NC

For 19 months during World War II, President Roosevelt and Premier Stalin did the inconceivable.

They authorized a little-known mission called Project Zebra, which was finally declassified in 2013, making it one of the war's last never-been-told stories. Zebra is the only documented instance in history where Russian flying aces and their crews were trained in America by Americans. They learned to fly a state-of-the-art, heavily-armed amphibious warplane called the PBN-Nomad.

America produced 186 of these huge 11-crew planes in Philadelphia and quietly ferried them to the patriotic town of Elizabeth City, North Carolina (population 12,000). There, a select group of 11 U.S. Naval officers trained 300+ Soviet airmen while the town and the media kept their secret. Ultimately, these heavily-armed Nomads destroyed numerous Nazi U-boats and Japanese submarines in the Atlantic and Pacific theaters without losing a single plane.

The entire story is meticulously chronicled for the first time in the new book, *Project Zebra: Roosevelt and Stalin's Top-Secret Mission to Train 300 Soviet Airman in America*, by the critically-acclaimed author M.G. Crisci (Orca Publishing USA, \$32.95, hardcover, 354 pp and 200+ photographs).

According to the author, and his 96-year-old collaborator, Gregory Gagarin, the last remaining Zebra survivor, Project Zebra was also a historic human event. The Russian and American teams shared experiences that created bonds of trust and mutual respect, despite their language barriers and cultural differences. The book contains more than 200 rare pictures and documents, some buried in personal archives for seven decades.

"Everything about Project Zebra is designed to make complex history approachable to future generations and perhaps serve as a model of what might be possible even during these uncertain Russian-American times," said Crisci.

Two respected Washington DC cross-cultural organizations, the Eurasia Center Worldwide and the American-Russian Cultural Foundation, call the book, "a lesson for future generations" and "an unknown heroic memoir in US-Soviet relations that serves as a historic signpost for future generations."

Manhattan-born M.G. Crisci (mgcrisci.com) is the author of ten books based on true stories or real events in the genres of fiction, nonfiction, drama, and romance. His most recent book, The Salad Oil King. An American Tale of Greed Gone Mad (Orca Publishing USA), has been hailed by critics as an "American crime classic spun by a master story-teller." Recently, Crisci, a 22-time selectee to Who's Who in the World, received the Albert Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award for his business, literary, and cultural contributions (<http://bit.ly/2uO0nB4>).

A select group of 11 U.S. Naval officers were chosen to overcome cultural barriers, conflicting political ideologies, and complex language barriers to train over 300 elite Soviet airmen to fly what arguably remains the largest and deadliest amphibious warplane ever made in America — the PBN-Nomad.

According to official documents, 185 of these giant aircraft were made in Philadelphia, and ferried to the tiny port city of Elizabeth City, North Carolina (population 12,000), where the Navy officers trained the Soviets to fly and maintain the aircraft. After training, joint crews delivered the aircraft to the North Atlantic and Pacific Theaters where they ran hundreds of Soviet seek-and-destroy missions against German and Japanese submarines without the loss of a single plane.

“Roosevelt visited Elizabeth City before Pearl Harbor, so he knew the huge Coast Guard base could service war needs,” said Crisci. “But, once he passed, Truman’s disrespect for all things Soviet became abundantly clear. As the war nearly concluded, Vice Admiral Patrick Bellinger recommended each Naval officer for a Medal of Honor. His recommendation included written words of praise from the senior Soviet command. Unfortunately, Truman simply ignored the request and the mission. He had no interest in letting Congress, the Senate or the public know about a mission with the Soviets in America. And so, Project Zebra was lost in time, until now.”

Project Zebra. Stalin and Roosevelt’s Top-Secret Mission to Train 300 Soviet Airmen in America (Orca Publishing USA, \$32.95, hardcover, 354 pp and 200+ photographs) is the first ever book about the mission, the town’s supportive relationship, and the lifetime friendships the Soviet and American Zebras would cultivate through the Cold War and beyond.

Two respected Washington DC cross-cultural organizations, the Eurasia Center Worldwide and the American-Russian Cultural Foundation, call the book, “a lesson for future generations” and “an unknown heroic memoir in US-Soviet relations that serves as a historic signpost for future generations.”

Manhattan-born M.G. Crisci (mgcrisci.com) is the author of ten books based on true stories or real events in the genres of fiction, nonfiction, drama, and romance. His most recent book, The Salad Oil King. An American Tale of Greed Gone Mad (Orca Publishing USA), has been hailed by critics as an “American crime classic spun by a master story-teller.” Recently, Crisci, a 22-time selectee to Who’s Who in the World, received the Albert Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award for his business, literary, and cultural contributions (<http://bit.ly/2uO0nB4>).

Contact:
Mary Ann Crisci
maryanncrisci@gmail.com
760.201.5154

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Surprise! Russia thanks America for secretly building 185 huge, state-of-the-art warplanes in Philadelphia...under budget and ahead of schedule



Circa 1944. Soviet PBN-Nomad Naval Factory assembly line at the US Naval Factory

Does such a gracious thank you sound preposterous given today's strained American-Russian relations? Well, there was a time....

During the early moments of the Yalta Summit, Franklin Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin agreed to undertake a groundbreaking top-secret mission called *Project Zebra* that would be unheard of today. In fact, the mission was only declassified by the Department of the Navy in late December 2012, some 70 years after the fact.

During the 18-month mission, 2,000 American workers designed and manufactured 185 of the world's largest amphibious warplanes — ahead of schedule — at the U.S. Naval Factory in Philadelphia. A team of 11 select Naval officers and their crews flew the planes — decorated with giant red stars — to Elizabeth City, population 12,000. There they were met by 300+ Soviet airmen who were trained to fly and maintain the planes. When the Soviet crews were deemed ready, multicultural crews transported these heavily armed amphibious planes — the size of today's 737's — to the North Atlantic and Pacific Theaters where they ran hundreds of combat missions without losing a single plane.

But Project Zebra became more than just a one-of-a-kind military mission. It was a historic human drama where men overcame cultural stereotypes, political differences, and language barriers to build friendships that would quietly last a lifetime. As the mission entered its final days in September 1945, the senior Soviet production officer, Col. Boris Tiertsiev, wrote a poignant letter to Vice-Admiral Patrick Bellinger of the US Navy. It said in part, “there are not even words to describe our admiration and respect to the many Americans who built the reliable warplanes in a timely manner that allowed our culture to survive. You will remain in our hearts forever.”

Fortunately, much of never-before-told Zebra story, the town’s supportive relationship, and the lifetime friendships the Soviet and American Zebras would cultivate through the Cold War and beyond have been turned into the first book ever written about the mission, by critically-acclaimed author, M.G. Crisci, *Project Zebra. Roosevelt and Stalin’s Top-Secret Mission to Train 300 Soviet airmen in America.* (Orca Publishing USA, \$32.95, hardcover, 354 pp. and 200+ photographs). “It was also my good-fortune that the sole surviving Zebra, then U.S. Lt. Gregory Gagarin, became my collaborator and documentarian,” said Crisci.

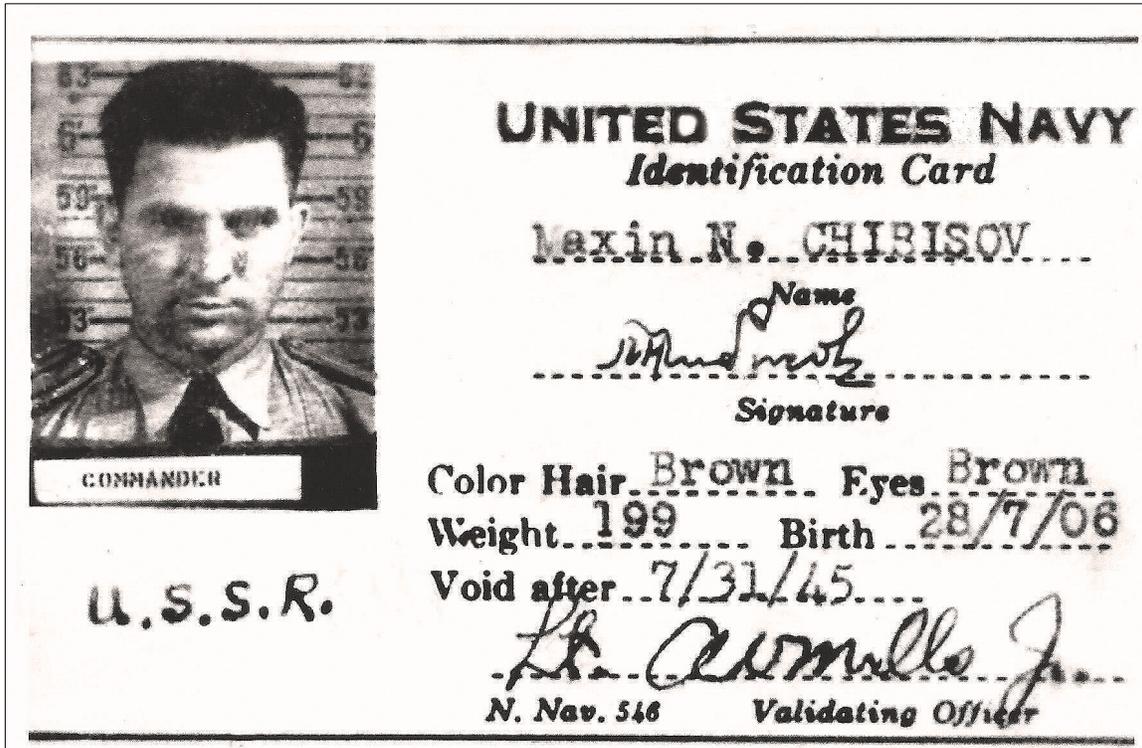
Two respected Washington DC cross-cultural organizations, the Eurasia Center Worldwide and the American-Russian Cultural Foundation, call the book, “a lesson for future generations” and “an unknown heroic memoir in US-Soviet relations that serves as a historic signpost for future generations.”

Manhattan-born M.G. Crisci (mgcrisci.com) is the author of ten books based on true stories or real events in the genres of fiction, nonfiction, drama, and romance. His most recent book, The Salad Oil King. An American Tale of Greed Gone Mad (Orca Publishing USA), has been hailed by critics as an “American crime classic spun by a master story-teller.” Recently, Crisci, a 22-time selectee to Who’s Who in the World, received the Albert Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award for his business, literary, and cultural contributions (<http://bit.ly/2uO0nB4>).

Contact:
Mary Ann Crisci
maryanncrisci@gmail.com
760.201.5154

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Decorated Russian Commander expresses “Deep Esteem” and “Everlasting Appreciation” during unknown top-secret mission in America



Colonel Maxim Chibisov with US Navy ID card he used during Project Zebra

When Hitler destroyed 80 percent of the Soviet air force during the early days of World War II, the decorated Russian air hero, Colonel Maxim Chibisov, was personally selected by Joseph Stalin to fly to Elizabeth City, North Carolina, with 300 Soviet airmen.

There “Max,” as he affectionately came to be known by Soviet and U.S. Naval officers, trained long hours learning to operate a huge, technically advanced amphibious plane called the PBN-Nomad. Over the course of 18 months in 1944-45, America built 185 Nomads in Philadelphia while 11 select US Navy officers trained the Soviet crews. The officers then assisted Max in delivering the planes to the North Atlantic and Pacific theaters. There, the planes, nicknamed named “flying boats,” flew hundreds of combat missions without losing a single plane.

While in America, Max and his men were struck by many things American. First and foremost, was the professionalism of the American officers. Second, despite language and customs barriers, both sides came to trust and respect each other as equals. Finally, Max felt the welcoming smiles of Elizabeth City’s 12,000 residents, and the abundance of the basics of life even during wartime.

According to his diaries, memoirs, and related interviews, Max even considered moving to America after the war. But, recalled the lone surviving Zebra, American officer Gregory Gagarin, Max ultimately decided "Once Russian always Russian."

Before Max left America, he spoke from the heart in a letter to the US Navy's Vice Admiral Patrick Bellinger. "I shall take the greatest pleasure in telling the people of my country about the warm and friendly reception accorded all my officers and me during our stay at your base in Elizabeth City. The deep feeling of esteem and appreciation for you will remain with me forever."

"Much about Project Zebra has been lost in time, since the mission remained top-secret until early 2013," said critically-acclaimed author, M.G. Crisci, who has written the first complete about the mission, the town's supportive relationship, and the lifetime friendships the Soviet and American Zebras would cultivate through the Cold War and beyond. The book, *Project Zebra. Roosevelt and Stalin's Top-Secret Mission to Train 300 Soviet Airmen in America*. (Orca Publishing USA, \$32.95, hardcover, 354 pp and 200+ photographs), has received numerous endorsements from international cross-cultural organizations and historical societies and is available in online bookstores everywhere.

Manhattan-born M.G. Crisci (mgcrisci.com) is the author of ten books based on true stories or real events in the genres of fiction, nonfiction, drama, and romance. His most recent book, The Salad Oil King. An American Tale of Greed Gone Mad (Orca Publishing USA), has been hailed by critics as an "American crime classic spun by a master story-teller." Recently, Crisci, a 22-time selectee to Who's Who in the World, received the Albert Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award for his business, literary, and cultural contributions (<http://bit.ly/2uO0nB4>).

Contact:
Mary Ann Crisci
maryanncrisci@gmail.com
760.201.5154

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

***U.S. Navy top brass praises
Russian-American cooperation, respect and professionalism***



High-respected Vice-Admiral of the US Navy Patrick Bellinger

When Hitler virtually destroyed the Soviet air force, top-secret Project Zebra, a pet project of Franklin Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin, became a priority. But making the mission an operational success fell into the capable hands of the U.S. Navy's highly-decorated Vice Admiral Paul Bellinger, the Navy's Number Two at the time.

Initially skeptical, Bellinger followed orders. He devised an innovative production plan to manufacture 185 of the largest amphibious warplanes ever made at the Naval Air Factory in Philadelphia. Then he handselected 11 Navy officers to ferry the 11-crew planes with giant red Soviet stars to the small town of Elizabeth City, North Carolina (population: 12,000). There, the American officers and their support staff quietly trained 300 Soviet airmen transported to the United States under the cover of night.

To lead the men, he appointed Lt. Col. Stanley Chernack, a man of Russian decent, who spoke no Russian, and an MIT graduate, Lt. Gregory Gagarin, who was the immigrant son of Russian aristocracy, and spoke perfect Russian. Together the three gained the confidence of the Soviet airman and the surrounding town of Elizabeth City.

Seventy-two years later, the previously classified papers of Chernack were discovered in a Burbank, California, basement. Among the never-before seen-pictures and documents was a letter from Bellinger to the Secretary of the Navy praising the "extraordinary professional and sensitive handling of one of the most extraordinary partnerships in military history." This story, and many other human-interest moments have become the basis of a new book by critically-acclaimed author M.G. Crisci. *Project*

Zebra. Stalin and Roosevelt's Top-Secret Mission to Train 300 Soviet Airmen in America. (Orca Publishing USA, \$32.95, hardcover, 354 pp and 200+ photographs).

“Since Project Zebra was only declassified by the Navy in late 2012, I believe this is the first book ever about the mission, the town’s supportive relationship, and the lifetime friendships the Soviet and American Zebras would cultivate through the Cold War and beyond,” said Crisci. “And the fact that the mission’s lone survivor, Gregory Gagarin, recalled intimate details and had saved so many key documents, made this book a unique piece of American military history.”

Two respected Washington DC cross-cultural organizations, the Eurasia Center Worldwide and the American-Russian Cultural Foundation, call the book, “a lesson for future generations” and “an unknown heroic memoir in US-Soviet relations that serves as a historic signpost.”

Manhattan-born M.G. Crisci (mgcrisci.com) is the author of ten books based on true stories or real events in the genres of fiction, nonfiction, drama, and romance. His most recent book, The Salad Oil King. An American Tale of Greed Gone Mad (Orca Publishing USA), has been hailed by critics as an “American crime classic spun by a master story-teller.” Recently, Crisci, a 22-time selectee to Who’s Who in the World, received the Albert Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award for his business, literary, and cultural contributions (<http://bit.ly/2uO0nB4>).

Contact:
Mary Ann Crisci
maryanncrisci@gmail.com
760.201.5154

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Newly-discovered documents identify tiny Elizabeth City, North Carolina, site of the largest Russian-U.S. military mission ever conducted on American soil



Circa 1943. Main Street, Elizabeth City, North Carolina

Why would President Franklin and Joseph Stalin decide to implement a complicated top-secret military mission in a small American town of 12,000 people?

From a military point of view, the town contained the largest dual-runway Coast Guard base in America, with huge hangars, storage and maintenance facilities. In other words, just the place to park 185 of the world's largest amphibious warplanes produced up the road at the Naval Air Factory in Philadelphia. Then, fly 300 Soviet airmen, under the cover of night, to learn how to fly these planes at the base at the outskirts of town.

From Roosevelt's point of view, he had visited Elizabeth City during his 1940 election campaign and talked to the citizens. He was convinced the town's welcoming patriotism and ability to keep a secret would one-day bode well. When Hitler destroyed 80 percent of the Soviet Air Force at the outset of World War Two, the project t became a reality called Project Zebra.

In late 2012, Project Zebra was finally declassified by the US Navy. Two years later, critically acclaimed author M.G. Crisci, pieced together long-buried documents, interviews, and photographs and notes found in the basement of Zebra Commander Stanley Chernack, who died in 2003. *Project Zebra. Stalin and Roosevelt's Top-Secret Mission to Train 300 Soviet Airmen in America.* (Orca Publishing USA, \$32.95, hardcover, 354 pp + 200 photographs) is the first book ever about the mission, the town's supportive

relationship, and the lifetime friendships the Soviet and American Zebras would cultivate through the Cold War and beyond.

“I also had the extraordinary good fortune of finding the last remaining survivor of Zebera --- Lieutenant Gregory Gagarin, the Russian-speaking MIT graduate, who was the glue that held the mission together through cultural misunderstandings and language barriers,” said Crisci.

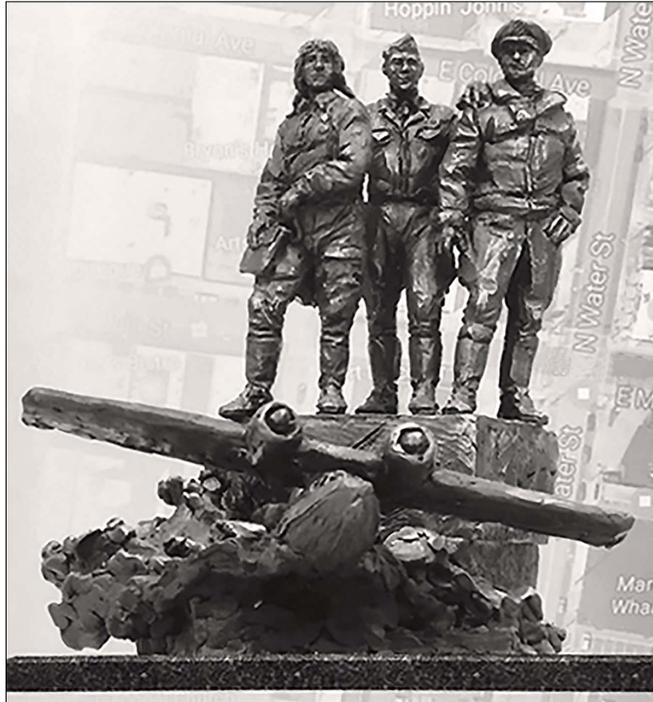
Two respected Washington DC cross-cultural organizations, the Eurasia Center Worldwide and the American-Russian Cultural Foundation, call the book, “a lesson for future generations” and “an unknown heroic memoir in US-Soviet relations that serves as a historic signpost.”

Manhattan-born M.G. Crisci (mgcrisci.com) is the author of ten books based on true stories or real events in the genres of fiction, nonfiction, drama, and romance. His most recent book, The Salad Oil King. An American Tale of Greed Gone Mad (Orca Publishing USA), has been hailed by critics as an “American crime classic spun by a master story-teller.” Recently, Crisci, a 22-time selectee to Who’s Who in the World, received the Albert Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award for his business, literary, and cultural contributions (<http://bit.ly/2uO0nB4>).

Contact:
Mary Ann Crisci
maryanncrisci@gmail.com
760.201.5154

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

***New monument to celebrate an important but virtually unknown
Russian-American top-secret World War Two mission in North Carolina***



Bronze cast of new monument designed and produced by Russian artists

Imagine the Russian Government building an 18-foot tall bronze monument in a North Carolina park to thank America for helping Russia survive as a country and a culture...

Once upon a time, 72 years ago, President Franklin Roosevelt and Premier Joseph Stalin agreed on the largest Soviet-US military mission to ever take place on U.S. soil. The top-secret World War II mission, only recently declassified, included production of 185 huge, state-of-the-art amphibious warplanes in Philadelphia and training of over 300 Soviet airmen in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, by 11 specially selected Naval air officers.

According to the training mission's last living survivor, then Navy Lieutenant Gregory Gagarin, "It was simply amazing that we pulled off the 18-month mission without a single media leak." Recently discovered documents also indicate that despite major differences in culture and language, the men came to trust and respect each other. Some became life-long friends. Fortunately, Gagarin, the son of a Russian aristocrat, and a graduate of MIT, sensed the historic nature of the mission. "The first time I stood in front of one of those giant flying boats surrounded by 300 Soviet officers, I realized my kids and grandchildren would never believe what happened unless there was documentation."

Critically-acclaimed author M.G. Crisci, learned of Gagarin, and began an two-year search to collect interviews, insights, pictures, and other documentaion. In the end, Crisci created the first book ever written about the mission. *Project Zebra. Stalin and Roosevelt's Top-Secret Mission to Train 300 Soviet Airmen in America*. (Orca Publishing USA, \$32.95, hardcover, 354 pp and 200+ photographs
"As I was in the final stages of the book, fate stepped in," said Crisci. The Russian Government had long wanted to create a lasting tribute to the cross-cultural mission. They approached the Mayor of Elizabeth City, the Honorable Joseph Peel in mid-2017. Some months later, the City Council agreed to install the proposed monument with the faces of an American, Russian and British soldier standing over a plane replica. The completed monument is expected to be ready for installation by late 2018.

Two respected Washington DC cross-cultural organizations, the Eurasia Center Worldwide and the American-Russian Cultural Foundation, call the book, "a lesson for future generations" and "an unknown heroic memoir in US-Soviet relations that serves as a historic signpost."

Manhattan-born M.G. Crisci (mgcrisci.com) is the author of ten books based on true stories or real events in the genres of fiction, nonfiction, drama, and romance. His most recent book, The Salad Oil King. An American Tale of Greed Gone Mad (Orca Publishing USA), has been hailed by critics as an "American crime classic spun by a master story-teller." Recently, Crisci, a 22-time selectee to Who's Who in the World, received the Albert Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award for his business, literary, and cultural contributions (<http://bit.ly/2uO0nB4>).

Contact:
Mary Ann Crisci
maryanncrisci@gmail.com
760.201.5154

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

***CNN to the contrary,
Russians and Americans are working together to make a difference***



(l to r) Retired US Colonel James Connel, author M.G. Crisci, and Ret. Russian Colonel Maxim Alekseyev

Why would a retired US military officer, a decorated Russian pilot, and a critically-acclaimed American author meet at the Russian Cultural Center in Washington, D.C.? Answer: the three moved onto second careers that intersected.

The two colonels were part of a joint US-Russia POW/MIA task force working to bring closure to World War II families who had lost loved ones. One of their searches was to identify the remains of the six Russian soldiers who took off in a giant warplane the middle of the night during a top-secret mission called Project Zebra. The plane was originally scheduled to reach the North Atlantic Theater by way of Iceland but crashed in the Pasquotank River near Elizabeth City, North Carolina.

As it turned out, Project Zebra had remained classified until early 2013, so the unusual mission that involved the production of 185 of the largest amphibious warplanes ever made and the training of elite Soviet airman in Elizabeth City, remained one of the last untold stories of World War Two — until critically-acclaimed author, M.G. Crisci, began his research. Crisci, who had previously written two other books about Russian culture and its heroes (*Call Sign, White Lily* and *Seven Days in Russia*), became

aware of the mission through interviews with the last surviving member of Project Zebra, then-Lieutenant Gregory Gagarin.

“Those interviews, Greg’s pictures and documents, set me on a two-year investigative trail to gather lost documents, old pictures, and personal diaries. As fate would have it, my path collided with Jim and Maxim’s mission,” said Crisci. “We were simply amazed at the wonderful details and vintage documents Crisci’s work contained,” said Alekseyev and Connel. “His sharing with us has helped our project, and we wish him well with his important work.”

Project Zebra. Stalin and Roosevelt’s Top-Secret Mission to Train 300 Soviet Airmen in America. (Orca Publishing USA, \$32.95, hardcover, 354 pp and 200+ photographs) is the first complete book about the mission, the town’s supportive relationship, and the lifetime friendships the Soviet and American Zebras would cultivate through the Cold War and beyond. The book has already received numerous endorsements from international cross-cultural organizations and historical societies and is available in online bookstores everywhere.

Manhattan-born M.G. Crisci (mgcrisci.com) is the author of ten books based on true stories or real events in the genres of fiction, nonfiction, drama, and romance. His most recent book, The Salad Oil King. An American Tale of Greed Gone Mad (Orca Publishing USA), has been hailed by critics as an “American crime classic spun by a master story-teller.” Recently, Crisci, a 22-time selectee to Who’s Who in the World, received the Albert Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award for his business, literary, and cultural contributions (<http://bit.ly/2uO0nB4>).