



## A Castle for Engineers?

By: Ir. Chin Mee Poon

*Most people like to travel and engineers are no exception. And we all enjoy sharing our travel experiences with our friends and relatives. That's part of the fun in travelling. In the process of sharing, we are actually refreshing our memory and reliving the joy of experiencing new places and new faces one more time.*

*This corner welcomes any contribution from any engineer in the form of an interesting photograph and a brief write-up of not more than 300 words. The subject should preferably be related to engineering.*

This stately building stands between Fontanka Canal and Mikhailovsky Gardens on the South Bank of Neva River in St. Petersburg.

St. Petersburg is a handsome city created by Tsar Peter the Great as his "window on the west" in 1703. It became the capital of Russia in 1712. Fontanka Canal is one of the many canals in the city dug in the early days to drain the marshes on which the city is founded.

I was travelling in Russia with 3 others. For our 8 days in St. Petersburg,

we stayed in an apartment just a short walking distance away from this building.

I became fascinated with this building because of its name: Engineers' Castle. Isn't it great that engineers could also own a castle just like monarchs of yesteryears?

But alas! This building has a dark history. A majestic fairy-tale wooden summer palace belonging to Empress Elizabeth once stood here. In 1797, the wooden building was demolished to

make way for a massive brick building. Paul I, an insanely cruel Tsar who was living in constant fear of being assassinated by his own people, wanted to build a palace so solid and strong that it would be his haven from his many enemies. The palace was completed in 1800 and Paul I moved in. Barely one month later, he was found asphyxiated in his bed.

In 1823, Paul I's palace became the Military Engineering Academy, hence its present name. One wing is now part of the Russian Museum nearby, which is one of the two world renowned museums in St. Petersburg. The other is the Hermitage, Russia's equivalent to the British Museum in London and Musee du Louvre in Paris.

Engineers, after all, do not own a castle. ■

