

ANDERSON. J.



Seaman James Anderson, Number 1558x, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on a bronze beneath the Caribou at the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

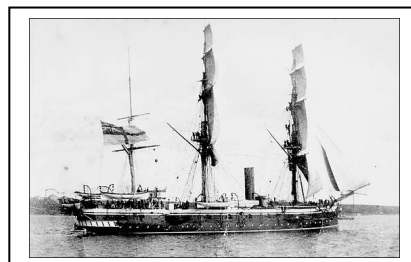
Having relinquished his occupation as a fisherman, James Anderson answered the call of the naval authorities and travelled across the entire island from Port aux Basques to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, where, on January 18 of 1915, he reported...to duty...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS Calypso, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that January 18 he enlisted for the first time into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for a single year\* and underwent a satisfactory medical assessment on the morrow. He also likely attested at this time, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V.

(Right: George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India: as a boy and young man he had served in the Royal Navy from 1877 until 1891 and always retained a fondness for the Senior Service. – The photograph of the King attired in the uniform of an Admiral of the Fleet is from the Royal Collection Trust web-site and taken in or about 1935.)



**(Right: At the outset of their career, the ‘Calypso-Class’ ships were apparently considered to be superior vessels. Hybrids - powered by both steam and sail - they were able to police the outer reaches of the British Empire most efficiently and economically. The rapid progress in engine technology, however, was to mean that HMS ‘Calypso’ and her sister-ships would soon be out-classed by newer vessels. – This Royal Navy photograph, taken before 1902 when the drill-hall was reportedly built on her upper deck and the funnel removed, is from Wikipedia)**



**\*In the early days of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist. Later recruits – as of or about May of 1916 - signed on for the ‘Duration’ at the time of their original enlistment.**



**(Right above: The White Ensign has been flown by the Royal Navy in its present form since about the year 1800 although other naval ensigns had existed for at least two centuries. It consists of a red St. George’s Cross – the national flag of England - on a white field with the Union Flag\* in the upper canton.)**

**\*The Union Flag is commonly referred to as the ‘Union Jack’; this is, in fact, a misnomer since a flag is referred to as a ‘Jack’ only when flown from the bow of a ship.**

**Note: During the years preceding the Great War the only military force on the Island of Newfoundland – apart from a handful of ill-fated local attempts – was to be the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland). Even so, it was to be some thirty years after the withdrawal of British troops from the Dominion in 1870 before the Reserve came into being in 1902.**

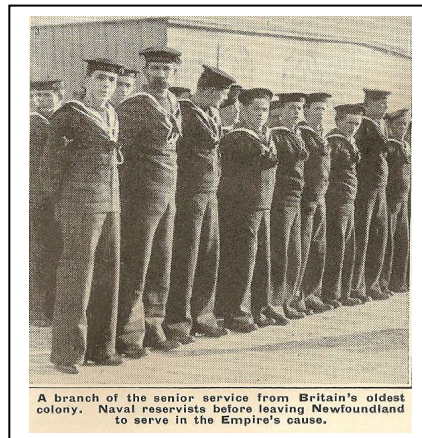
**Just fewer than four-hundred men were sought to enroll as seamen – apparently automatically at the rank of Able Seaman - and to present themselves annually in St. John’s for five years in order to train for a period of twenty-eight days per annum. Allowed to report at a time of their own choosing, it is perhaps not surprising that these volunteers – mostly fishermen – were to opt to train during the winter months when fishing work was minimal.**



**(Right above: Recruits of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) seen here in front of HMS ‘Calypso’. The shed-like superstructure seen behind them had been built onto the ship in 1902 to serve as a drill-hall. Whether the vessel was still ‘Calypso’, or had become ‘Briton’ by this time (see further below) is not clear. – photograph from Newfoundland Provincial Archives via Wikipedia)**

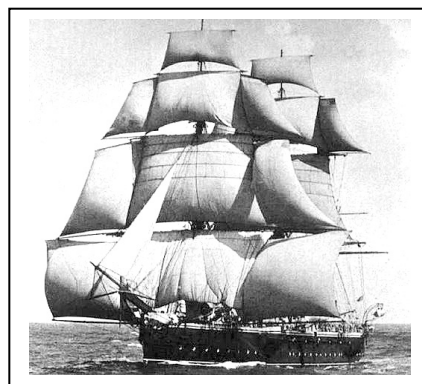
**Expenses were apparently defrayed for the most part by the British (Imperial) Government and an attempt was made to ensure the number of recruits would be kept constantly at a maximum. This practice and policy was then to be continued up until the onset of hostilities some twelve years later.**

**Of course, the purpose of having a reserve force at any time is to provide a trained force ready at any time to serve at a time of need or crisis. Thus in August of 1914, upon the Declaration of War by the government in London, hundreds of those men of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) were to make their way to St. John's, from there to take passage overseas to bolster the ranks of the Royal Navy.**



**(Right above: Naval reservists from Newfoundland, during the early days of the Great War, before their departure for the United Kingdom - from *The War Illustrated*)**

**An elderly vessel, H.M.S. 'Calypso', having become surplus to the Admiralty's needs, had been provided to the Dominion of Newfoundland by the Royal Navy in 1902 for training purposes. After some debate it was eventually decided that she would be permanently moored in the harbour of the capital, her superstructure reduced, and a wooden shelter built on her upper deck to provide training facilities and living quarters for the prospective naval recruits.**



**(Right above: H.M.S. 'Calypso' in full sail. She was to be re-named Briton in 1916 when a new 'Calypso', a modern cruiser, was about to be launched by the Royal Navy. – This photograph, taken of her by the Royal Navy, taken in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)**

**Seventeen days after having first reported to Calypso in St. John's, on February 4 Seaman Anderson was apparently promoted from the rank of Seaman Recruit to that of Seaman; thereupon, on the same February 4 of that 1915, the records next suggest that he was to depart from St. John's to cross the Atlantic.**



**In fact, it appears to have been a little more complicated than that.**

**On that February 4, the detachment of volunteers for the Army that upon its arrival at Edinburgh Castle was to become 'C' Company of the Newfoundland contingent in the United Kingdom, had boarded the tender *Neptune* in St. John's Harbour for the short journey down the coast to Bay Bulls. There the ocean-going vessel *Dominion* awaited to carry it across the Atlantic and the documents of some Reservists, also citing February 4, might suggest that they were to be a part of that contingent.**

**(continued)**

(Preceding page: *The photograph of personnel of 'C' Company on board the 'Neptune' on the way to the harbour at Bay Bulls is from the Provincial Archives.*)

Other available sources do not, however, record any of those last-mentioned naval reservists having taken passage on *Dominion*. In fact, *Calypso's* drill register of the time records that the naval draft of the time, including Seaman Anderson, was to leave St. John's on board the *Allan Line* vessel, the *SS Mongolian*, on February 17 – although the ship's captain records (see below) that it was the 18<sup>th</sup>.

The situation seems to have been even a bit more convoluted: Days before, according to the local newspapers, on that above-mentioned February 4-5, *Mongolian* had left St. John's in an attempt to force a passage through the heavy ice surrounding the entrance to St. John's and extending well offshore. It was to no avail and after three days of futile effort the ship was to return to port.

In re-entering St. John's Harbour, however, the vessel had struck a rock and, after inspection, it was decided necessary to do emergency repairs in the local dock. In the meantime some of the vessel's passengers, but not the Reservists, were to take the train across the island so as to catch another ship in Halifax.

On or about February 23, the repairs having been completed, *Mongolian* departed Newfoundland once again, only to be immediately met with heavy seas which eventually were to at least partially undo much of the temporary work which had been completed to the ship only days before.

The following is an adaption of a letter written by *Mongolian's* captain after his ship had reached the safety of the harbour of Halifax on February 25. It was addressed to Lieutenant-Commander McDonnell of *HMS Calypso* who saw fit to forward it to the Office of the Colonial Secretary – whence it made its way to the local press.

Dear Sir:-

It is but just that I submit the following to your notice.

As you are aware, the ship under my command left St. John's 18<sup>th</sup> February with 200 R.N.R. ratings from your ship under the command of Captain Alan Goodridge. On their arrival on board '*Mongolian*' Captain Goodridge at once established regular discipline and routine.

Shortly after leaving port rough and foggy weather was encountered and as ship proceeded East this weather became worse each day. On 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> a heavy gale raged from North-East with very high seas, causing the ship to labour considerably. On the latter date trouble arose through the giving-out of temporary repairs done in St. John's. Considerable water was found making its way into the fore end of the ship. After consultation I decided to return here to Halifax.

I requested Captain Goodridge with ratings under his command to assist me in every way consistent with requirements. It is needless to say such help was given in

the most energetic and cheerful manner by way of preparing for any emergency. Manning deck pumps (which were kept going day and night until arrival into port). Also a number of men were detailed to assist in the engine room and stokehold. (Chief Engineer Brown of this ship desires me to specially mention the valuable assistance of these men.

For my part I cannot speak too highly of Captain Goodridge. His cheerful and composed manner throughout went far to inspire confidence not only in the men under his command but also the passengers entrusted to my care.

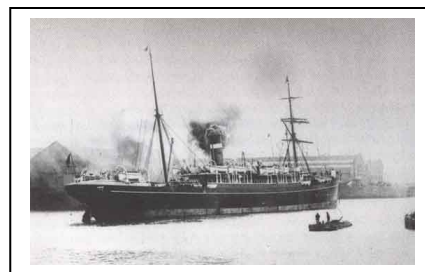
I would request, Sir, that you would be good enough to forward to His Excellency the Governor my appreciation for the assistance so ably rendered by him. I would also ask you to place on record my high opinion of Petty Officer George Gill and Armourer Luxon.

The entire staff of my ship join with me in thanking the men of the Newfoundland Reserve whose conduct throughout was most exemplary and helpful in every way.

I may say that almost immediately upon arrival here the men were transferred to the SS 'Scandinavian' and sailed about 9 p.m..

J.W. Hatherly  
Master S.S. Mongolian

**(Right: The SS 'Mongolian' was an elderly vessel constructed in 1891. Built for the Allan Line Company she was to have served as a troopship during the Boer War before being bought by the British Admiralty, again for war service, in 1914 or 1915. She was not to survive the conflict: on July 21 of 1918 she was torpedoed and sunk by U-boat 70 with a loss of thirty-five lives. – The photograph of Mongolian is from the British Home Child Group International web-site.)**



Once having disembarked from *Scandinavian* - on which they had journeyed from Halifax (see in letter found above) - in the United Kingdom in early March, the Newfoundland Naval personnel would have been either posted directly to a ship or ordered to undergo further training at one of various Royal Navy establishments – these for the most part in England. In the case of Seaman Anderson, the destination was to be HMS *Pembroke I* at Chatham in the English county of Kent.

*Pembroke I* was the base for regular seamen and also a holding barracks for those awaiting a posting to one of His Majesty's ships, and it was therefore *Pembroke I* to which Seaman Anderson was to be attached.

*\*There was also a series of ships named 'Pembroke', the last several of which were used as depot ships and for harbour service at Chatham. This is the 'HMS Pembroke' found on the cap-bands of the sailors who served there perhaps in their thousands - but who were never to set eyes on the actual ship in question.*

*Naval discipline being distinct in some ways from the laws that governed other parties such as the Army and civilians, sailors had to be on the books of a serving naval vessel to be legally subject to naval law and order, even when these sailors were serving on land.*

*Thus the elderly and obsolescent vessels that plied the waters adjacent to the many naval land establishments – and known as stone frigates – were in theory the home ships of the tens, hundreds, thousands of men who laboured ashore.*



*Which is why Seaman Anderson would have worn an HMS 'Pembroke' cap-band.*

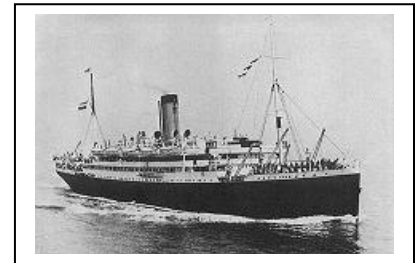
*(Right above: Some buildings of the large Royal Navy complex which was the HMS 'Pembroke' naval establishment at Chatham for just over one hundred years. Today it has been transformed into a university campus. – photograph from 2010)*

**On April 21 of that 1915, Seaman Anderson's term at *Pembroke I* came to an end and he was thereupon to join his ship, the by-then armed merchant cruiser *Ebro* which had only recently come into war-time service\*.**

*\*There was also an armed trawler by the name of 'Ebro' which was already in service by this time, but there is little doubt that the 'Ebro' in question was His Majesty's Armed Merchant Cruiser of that name.*

**On the above-mentioned date, sixty-nine Naval ratings, Seaman Anderson among that number, travelled the short distance from Chatham up to London, there to report to the Armed Merchant Cruiser *Ebro* which had just undergone conversion to her new role as a ship of the 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron (see further below).**

**Her construction having been completed only earlier that same year, *Ebro* was a mercantile vessel of some eight and a-half thousand tons. A part of her conversion had comprised the installation of six six-inch guns as well as two six-pounder weapons, armament that might be necessary to play her role of patrol-ship and, later on, convoy-escort.**



**She was to carry a crew of two-hundred sixty plus a further complement to supply boarding parties when needed and when Seaman Anderson stepped on her deck she was in the final throes of her preparation.**

*(Preceding page: The photograph of 'Ebro', possibly at a time following the conflict, is from the 'naval-history.net' web-site.)*

In fact, later on that same day she steamed out of the *Royal Albert Dock* for the short downstream journey to Gravesend where she and Seaman Anderson were to remain for the next nine days. She thereupon moved further down the River Thames to Sheerness to once again drop anchor for a further two weeks and two days.

(Right above: A six-inch gun such as those mounted on 'Ebro', although this one has been fitted for coastal defence – photograph from 2010(?) and taken at the Royal Artillery Museum at Woolwich)



What happened next is not entirely clear: his service records have Seaman Anderson returning to *Pembroke* in February of 1916 to serve there for four months – the caveat in this version of events being that by that time he had already been reported as having been...*killed in action*.

It will now be presumed that the remainder of Seaman Anderson's all-too brief naval career was to be spent on board *Ebro* and thus will be recounted the events of the following few months of the ship, of its crew and of Seaman Anderson himself.

*Ebro* was to be attached to the 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron, also known as the *Northern Patrol*, a force originally comprised of out-of-date warships which, by that January of 1915, had been replaced by requisitioned ocean-going passenger–liners and cargo vessels carrying a few guns off-times as old as some of the ships on which they were mounted.

The ships of the 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron were not spoiling for a fight. Their job was to form a part of the naval blockade designed to prevent ships carrying goods to Germany from reaching their destination; to accomplish this these vessels had to patrol the stormy waters between northern Scotland, Ireland, the Shetlands and Iceland, a thankless job at the best of times: during the tempestuous winter months, even worse.

The first months of 1915 had seen the Royal Navy Reserve (Newfoundland) incur heavy casualties; when *Viknor*, *Clan MacNaughton* and *Bayano* had been lost, so had the lives of some seventy Newfoundland seamen – as well as that of some seven-hundred other sailors.

His Majesty's Armed Merchant Cruiser *Ebro* began her first duties as such on May 16 when she sailed from Sheerness to join other vessels of the 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron on patrol. It was to take her three days to steam around to the south of England and Ireland and to take her place in the line on May 19. She thereupon remained at sea until June 11 when she sailed for the Scottish port-city of Glasgow where she arrived on the morrow.

There was to be little rest for the ship's crew in the days that followed: tons of coal had to be loaded – oil was almost still a novelty – and there was always the scrubbing of decks, the cleaning and painting of the vessel, the replenishing of stores, a myriad of small repairs, the maintenance of the ship's cutter and other lesser boats, as well as the most welcome mail and less welcome daily on-board tasks to organize and undertake.

(continued)

*Ebro* left Glasgow on June 19 and even before she was back on her post on June 22 she had stopped and inspected three vessels. During the days that followed she met with a number of Royal Navy ships, some requiring a visit by personnel in the ship's cutter; and the seas were not as empty as they sometimes appeared to be: a variety of thirty-three vessels flying both British and neutral flags were observed, questioned, at times boarded and even ordered to a British port with a boarding-party in charge.

The patrol typically lasted about a month by which time fuel and rations – and at times patience – were beginning to run low. On July 22 *Ebro* returned to Glasgow for a nine-day period before returning to the North Atlantic.

The several months that followed brought more of the same as before\*: four weeks at sea before more than a week ashore if at Glasgow, only four days if the anchorage and coaling-station at Swarbacks Minn in the Shetlands was visited as it often was. For those serving on *Ebro*, that Christmas of 1915 was spent afloat although Hogmanay (New Year's Eve was spent in the Shetlands) before it was back to work of January 7.

*\*Although there was a broken propeller blade on December 1 which necessitated a six-day reprieve, if such it was, in the Irish city of Belfast.*

(Right: A Memorial Scroll, a copy of which was distributed to the families of those who had sacrificed their life while serving in the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve)



The pertinent events of January 14 of the New Year, 1916, have been recorded as follows by the naval-history.net team:

**At Sea**

**Lat 61.00, Long 1.83**

**0.35am: Stopped and boarded Norwegian Barque\* "Olivia", Lat 60 51 N, Long 1 45 E. Boarding Officer S.H. Smiles Acting Lieutenant RNR.**

**3.0am: Ordered "Olivia" to proceed to Lerwick\*\* ; placed armed guard on board Lieutenant Bennett RNR in charge.**

HMAMC *Ebro* then continued on her way.

The Casualty List for this date includes: *Ebro*, armed merchant cruiser, armed guard on merchant ship, all killed in action (no further information). ANDERSON, James, Seaman, Newfoundland RNR, X 1558. BENNETT, Austin D, Act/Lieutenant, RNR. MOORE, George H, Able Seaman (RFR B 4374), 197138 (Ch). NEARS, Albert, Able Seaman (RFR B 3608), 194978 (Ch). POTTINGER, Alfred, Leading Seaman, J 2350 (Ch)]

**\*A three-masted sailing-ship**

**\*\*The capital and largest community of the Shetland Isles. The wrecksite.eu web-site has documented the following:**



**On January 5th, 1916, the Norwegian barque SV 'OLIVIA', owned at the time of her loss by Solbjørg Ole, Alesund, departed Leith with coal for Trondhjem and went missing. The whole crew, 10 hands in total, was lost.**

And on the *Great War Forum* web-site was to be found the following entry, perhaps more personal but no less a *propos* than the others:

*My grandfather James Fredrick Weston served as a Marine on the prize crew (on the Olivia). He told me of men of the boarding party that were killed that are mentioned in this forum. He was due to be a member of the party but his hat blew off and he was sent below to get his spare. By the time he returned the boarding crew had left; he was disappointed as they received extra pay for the prize and it was usually taken to Scapa Flow to be stripped and sunk, the men then returning to ship at a later date. He said they knew the men had been killed as their belongings were sold among the crew and money sent to their families. – Aggy Weston*

There were no survivors and *Olivia* disappeared altogether. Her loss has apparently remained a mystery to this day.

The son of Prosper Anderson, fisherman, and of Mary Ann Anderson (née *Ford*\*) of Mouse Island in the Church of England Parish of Channel, Newfoundland, he was also brother to twin Emma.

*\*The couple had been married in the community of Channel on August 23 of 1887.*

While the date of Seaman Anderson's is recorded as having been...*killed in action*...on January 14 of 1916, and while this is certainly likely, there exists no evidence of the circumstances of the events: date of birth on Mouse Island in the District of Burgeo-la Poile, Newfoundland, March 22, 1894 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register) or March 1 of the same year (from his enlistment papers).

*\*Seaman Anderson served only in the Royal Navy and was not in the service of Canada as is cited in some sources, notably the Commonwealth War Graves Commission*

Seaman James Anderson was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to [criceadam@yahoo.ca](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 22, 2023.