

BARBOUR, G.



Leading Deck Hand George Barbour, Number 1681x, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on a bronze beneath the Caribou at the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

Having travelled from Port Rexton (formerly *Ship Cove* and *Robin Hood*) on the Bonavista Peninsula to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on February 16 of 1915 George Barbour, fisherman, reported...to duty...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that same February 16 he enlisted for the first time into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for a single year's* war-time service and underwent the required 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.)



****At the outset 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.***

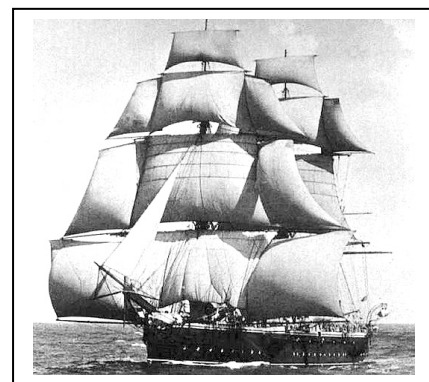
Note: During the years preceding the Great War the only military force on the Island of Newfoundland – apart from a handful of ill-fated local attempts – was to be the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland). Even so, it was to be some thirty years after the withdrawal of British troops from the Dominion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

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.

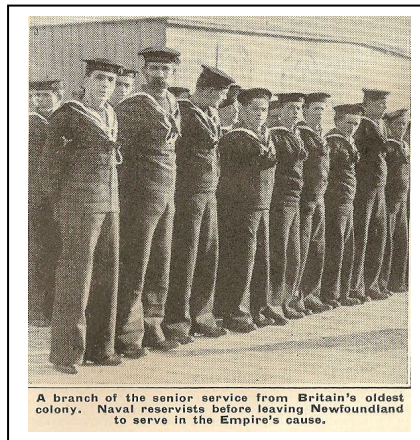
An elderly vessel, HMS ‘Calypso’, having become surplus to the Admiralty's needs, had been provided to the Dominion of Newfoundland by the Royal Navy in 1902 for training purposes. After some debate it was eventually decided that she would be permanently moored in the harbour of the capital, her superstructure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



(Preceding page: HMS 'Calypso' in full sail. She was to be re-named 'Briton' in 1916 when a new 'Calypso', a modern cruiser, was launched by the Royal Navy. – Royal Navy photograph from 1898 by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)

Following thirty-two days of training and service in St. John's and by that time having been promoted on March 16 from the rank of Seaman Recruit, Seaman Barbour is recorded as having left St. John's for overseas service in the United Kingdom on March 20 in the draft of seventy-one reservists which left for Halifax on board the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Stephano* with 'D' Company of the Newfoundland Regiment, from there to take ship on the ocean-liner *Orduña* for trans-Atlantic passage*.

***'D' Company of the Newfoundland Regiment was on its way to Scotland to join the Newfoundland contingent already serving there at Edinburgh Castle.**

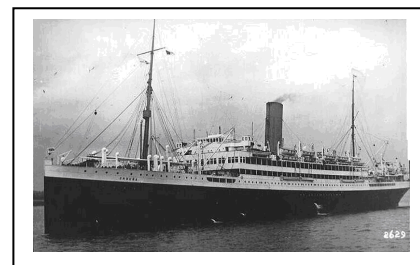


(Right above: Naval reservists from Newfoundland, during the early days of the Great War, before their departure for the United Kingdom - from *The War Illustrated*)

Once having disembarked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool it appears that several of the Naval men were posted directly to a ship. Others were ordered to undergo further training at various Royal Navy establishments and thus, likely having journeyed by train, reported to these bases on or about March 30. In the case of Seaman Barbour, the destination was to be HMS *Victory I* established in the south-coast port-city of Portsmouth.



(Right above: The photograph of 'Stephano' sailing through the Narrows of St. John's Harbour is by courtesy of the Provincial Archives.)



(Right above: The recently-built 'Orduña' – constructed in 1913-1914 - was requisitioned during the Great War for use as an armed merchant cruiser and also as a troop transport. Involved with the unfortunate Jewish refugees in the 'Voyage of the Damned' affair, the vessel was later also to be used as a troopship and an evacuation transport during the conflict of 1939-1945 before being finally laid up in 1950. – photograph from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site)

***The Royal Navy had a disciplinary system which in certain ways differed from civil – and even Army – law; but for it to be employed, a sailor had to be attached to a ship. While at sea, of course, this posed no problem, but when a sailor was performing duties on land that were not associated directly to a particular ship he still had to be held accountable for any untoward behaviour.**

The Navy's training establishments were for the most part on land: Devonport (although apparently it was only a shore-base during the Great War), Chatham, and Portsmouth for example, were land bases for many thousands of naval personnel, some of who were permanently stationed there. Thus the practice became to base an elderly or even obsolete ship in the nearby port to be, nominally, the vessel to which this personnel was to be attached. This appears to have been the procedure for the large number of shore bases organized around the coast of the United Kingdom during the Great War.

Thus, HMS 'Victory', the base to which Seaman Barbour had been ordered after his arrival in the United Kingdom from Newfoundland, was not only all the buildings and facilities on shore, but also HMS 'Victory' the warship, the vessel from which Admiral Nelson had directed the Battle of Trafalgar – although the ship's illustrious history is not limited to that one single incident.

It was also the name which all the sailors attached to HMS 'Victory' were to have emblazoned on the bands of their caps.

Furthermore, these establishments were at times divided into sections: 'Victory I' was where the seamen (as opposed to the engine-room personnel, for example, in 'Victory II') such as Seaman Barbour were to be stationed while awaiting a posting to one of His Majesty's ships.

(Right: HMS 'Victory' is seen here in dry dock in the southern English naval port-city of Portsmouth where she has been since the late 1920s – photograph from Wikipedia)



Seaman Barbour was to serve at Victory I from the time of his arrival in the United Kingdom for some forty-four days – whereupon his record becomes a little less clear. During this period, on or about May 5-6, he was transferred to the Royal Naval Reserve Trawler Section with the rank of Deck Hand – this Section perhaps at the above-mentioned Victory II where he then was to have remained for a further twenty-nine weeks less a day.

On November 26 of that 1915 he was attached to HMS Research, the name of the Royal Navy Auxiliary Patrol Base, and also of its depot ship, at Portland Harbour in the county of Dorset, still one of the largest man-made ports in the world. Seaman Barbour is recorded as serving at Research – whether on the vessel itself or at a shore-based subsidiary facility is not clear – from that above last-named date until July 31 of the following year, 1916.

But the aforesaid dates are only on paper and, if the later events suggested by his scant service records are correct, then some of those last days and likely final weeks, were to be spent by Seaman Barbour en route to the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea and to the Greek island of Lemnos (also found as Limnos). There he was officially attached to HMS Osiris as of August 1, 1916, although as seen above, he may not have reported there until some time later.

Osiris was a small *P&O Company* passenger liner which prior to the *Great War* had operated on the commercial route from the southern Italian port of Brindisi to Egypt. She had been requisitioned at beginning of the conflict to serve as an Armed Merchant Cruiser but after two months had subsequently assumed the duties of a fleet messenger before in April of 1915 becoming a submarine depot ship at Malta. In 1916 she was to be re-named as *Osiris II*, and sent to *Mudros Bay*, the British naval base on the island of Lemnos, to become responsible for a flotilla of armed drifters and trawlers primarily used as mine-sweepers.

It may be that His Majesty's Drifter *Paragon* was one of those smaller vessels – Seaman Barbour's personal files appear to record *Taragon* but there seems to have been no ship of that name and at that time in the Royal Navy files*. If such were the case, then *Paragon* was likely the boat on which he was to serve from August 1, 1916, until March 31, 1918.



(Right above: *The photograph of a peace-time 'Osiris' is from the 'Old Ship Picture Galleries' web-site.*)

**There was another 'Paragon', a modern destroyer, but she was operating in British waters at the time of Seaman Barbour's posting to the Mediterranean.*

(Right: *Mudros Bay almost a century after the time of the 'Gallipoli Campaign' – photograph from 2011*)

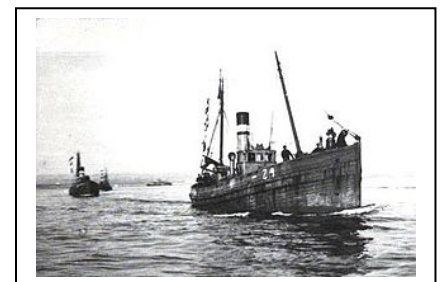


(Right below: *Mudros Bay – its tiny harbour seen here full to capacity with Allied shipping during the 'Gallipoli Campaign' – was the base of a great number of medical facilities. – from Illustration*)

In early 1915 the bay at Mudros had been bereft of any activity. It was only when the *Gallipoli* venture began that the British and French transformed the area into a base and a medical complex – without asking permission from the Greek government whose island it was and which was neutral at the time.



By the time of Seaman Barbour's arrival there, the problem of neutrality had been resolved in favour of the Allies and *Mudros Bay* was primarily a naval establishment since the British and French had withdrawn their troops from the Gallipoli Peninsula in January of 1916 and were now fighting elsewhere in the Middle East: at Salonika and in today's Syria, Lebanon and Iraq.



(Preceding page: *British drifters in the Mediterranean Sea 'at some time during the Great War'. – the photograph from Wikipedia*)

However, shipping in the eastern Mediterranean was still prolific and the British were yet in need of patrol vessels, escorts, mine-sweepers and other defensive-measure ships.

The requisitioned and thereupon-hired fishing-drifter *Paragon* was to be one such craft. Built in 1906 she weighed only just more than eighty tons. Converted and subsequently armed with a single three-pounder gun, she entered war-time service in May of 1915 and undertook the tasks of a net vessel and mine-sweeper until 1919.

There is no documentation among available files which suggest that the activities of *Paragon* during that time – and thus those of Seaman Barbour in his time of service on her – were anything other than the routine duties of any other such vessel of His Majesty's drifter and trawler fleet. The ship and he are documented as having been affiliated for more than nineteen months.

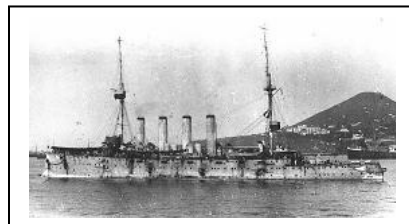
On March 13 of 1918, with Seaman Barbour remaining for the next few weeks on board *Paragon*, the requisitioned yacht *Valhalla II* arrived at Mudros to become a tender to *Osiris II* and to take over some of *Osiris II*'s former duties and responsibilities. Whether this new arrangement had anything to do with Seaman Barbour's almost immediate transfer to another vessel is not recorded. However, thus it was, and Seaman Barbour on April 1 of 1918 became a crew-member of the hired trawler *Renarro*.

In fact, he became *Leading Deck Hand*.

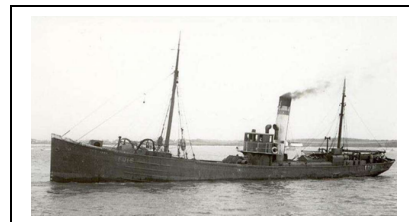
The ship had come a long way, from the east of England coastal fishing port and town of Grimsby. A more recently-built – in 1913 – and a larger vessel – two-hundred thirty tons – than *Paragon*, she was armed with a similar small three-pounder quick-firing weapon and was also to work as a minesweeper.

**During the War, 1456 such vessels were requisitioned from ports around the British Isles and even elsewhere of which two-hundred sixty-four were to be lost.*

In the meantime further plans were underway to once again shuffle the administration and logistics of the Royal Navy facilities at *Mudros Bay*: an elderly Diadem-Class cruiser, HMS *Europa*, had already been serving as flagship there since 1915, but now in 1918 it appears that ship was to take on supplementary duties; His Majesty's Trawler *Renarro*, stationed at Mudros and at nearby Tenedos since March of 1915, seems to have been one of them.



(Right above: *The photograph of HMS 'Europa' – the same class of vessel as HMCS 'Niobe' on which many Newfoundland Reservists served – is from the naval-history.net web-site.*)



(continued)

This transfer was to take place officially on August 2 of 1918. What his entailed in practice seems not to be recorded. Perhaps changes, if any, were minimal, as none appear to have been recorded – as for Leading Deck Hand Barbour, he continued to serve on *Renarro* – although whether he retained the rank of *Leading* is not clear – we shall assume that he did.

(Preceding page: A photograph of '*Renarro*' not having been found, this is one of His Majesty's Trawlers, '*Arfon*', which was sunk under similar circumstances and one of whose dead was a Newfoundland Reservist, Seaman William T. Babstock, Number 477x, of *Happy Adventure*. – from a *Popular Mechanics.com* web-site)

(Right: A photographic example of the type of aforementioned 3-pounder gun as mounted on both '*Paragon*' and '*Renarro*' – from *Wikipedia*)



By November 10 of 1918, the fighting against the Turks had already come to an end. On October 30, at Mudros on the Greek Island of Lemnos, the *Armistice* of Mudros* was signed between the Ottoman Empire and Great Britain (representing the Allied and Associated powers).

**There were other armistices which drew the Great War to a close, that of November 11, 1918, being the best known. An armistice is, of course, an agreement to stop fighting but not a surrender and it was the most expedient way of bringing the Great War to a conclusion on its many fronts. Unfortunately the later peace settlements imposed at Versailles a year later were more than harsh – perhaps, some argue, understandably so – and they have often been seen as a major cause of the second conflict some twenty years afterwards.*

Incidentally, the Korean War fought in the early 1950s was also brought to a halt – but legally not to an end – by an armistice in 1953. The South Koreans never signed it, the Chinese withdrew from it in 1994, thus leaving North Korea and the United Nations as the only participants remaining in the agreement.

Some seventy years after this armistice came into effect, the Korean War is technically still not over.

On the above-said November 10, a Sunday, HM Trawler *Renarro* was occupied in sweeping *the Dardanelles* for mines. *The Dardanelles (Çanakkale Boğazı* the Turkish rendition), the waterway that leads from the Mediterranean* and continues - called by other names, Sea of Marmara, Bosphorus - past the venerable city of Istanbul and into the Black Sea, had been extensively mined by the Turks and a clause in the *Armistice of Mudros* allowed for the immediate clearing of the channel of mines and of any other impediments.



**It also physically separates Europe from Asia.*

(Preceding page: A replica of the historic Turkish Navy mine-layer ‘Nusret’ armed with replica mines on her stern, the ship which in February 1915 sank three Allies battleships and crippled one more as they attempted to force the Dardanelles. She is to be found moored at Çanakkale, close to the narrowest part of the channel. – photograph from 2011)

(Right: The entrance to ‘the Dardanelles’ which leads, from right to left, to Istanbul and beyond. The picture is taken from the western extremity of the Gallipoli Peninsula and Asia is on the far side of the channel. – photograph from 2011)

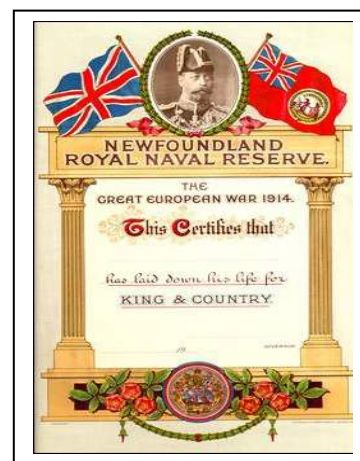


On that day HMT *Renarro* was in the Dardanelles and apparently snagged at least one mine – some reports say several - in her equipment and was destroyed by an ensuing explosion while trying to free herself. All twelve members of the crew were lost.

The son of Robert Barbour (also found as *Barber*), fisherman, and of Martha Barbour (née *Ivany**) of Port Rexton (*Ship Cove* at the time), Trinity Bay, he was also brother to James-Abbott and to George (born 1933).

*The couple was married in the Parish of Trinity East on December 12, 1891.

Leading Deck Hand Edgar George Barbour was documented as having died in the...*sinking of HMT Renarro*...on November 10 of the year 1918 at the age of twenty-four (this from all other sources such as the Newfoundland Death Register and Royal Navy Records, while *Find a Grave* cites November 12): date of birth in Ship Cove, Trinity Bay, Newfoundland, November 22, 1894 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).



(Right above: 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)

Leading Deck Hand Barbour served the Royal Navy and was not in the service of Canada as found in some sources, notably the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Leading Deck Hand George Barbour was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, to the British War Medal (centre) and to 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. Last updated – January 22, 2023.