

BRACE. A.



Seaman Albert Brace, Number 1219x, 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 Chance Cove to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on September 30 of 1914 Albert Brace, fisherman, reported...to duty...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that same September 30 he enlisted for the first time into the Reserve (see further below) and according to his Service Records was apparently signed on undertake an eight-year(?) – but likely five-year - term of service*. At this time he also underwent the requisite medical assessment and also likely attested, 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.



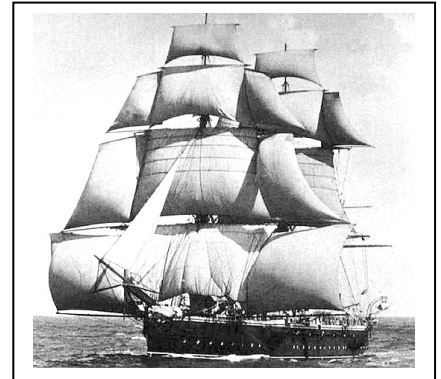
Just fewer than four-hundred men were sought to enroll as seamen – apparently automatically at the rank of Able Seaman - and to present themselves annually in St. John's for five years in order to train for a period of twenty-eight days per annum. Allowed to report at a time of their own choosing, it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

(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.

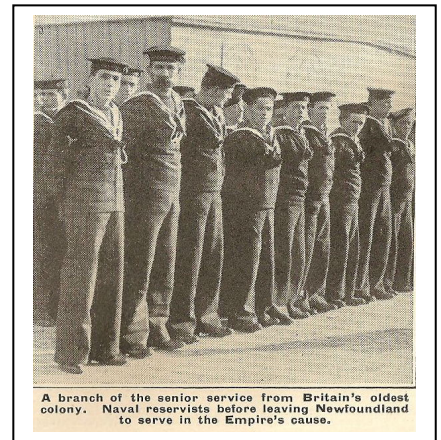
Of course, the purpose of having a reserve force at any time is to provide a trained force ready at any time to serve at a time of need or crisis. Thus in August of 1914, upon the Declaration of War by the government in London, hundreds of those men of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) were to make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

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: H.M.S. 'Calypso' in full sail. She was to be re-named 'Briton' in early 1916 when a new 'Calypso', a modern cruiser, was launched by the Royal Navy. – photograph by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)

Following those afore-mentioned five weeks* of service spent in St. John's, Seaman Brace, promoted by this time from the rank of seaman recruit and one of a draft of three-hundred nine Naval Reservists and officers, embarked on November 5-6 onto the Cunard ocean-liner Franconia which had arrived in St. John's having sailed from New York on her trans-Atlantic way to the United Kingdom.



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

***It appears that in many cases, even if the recruit in question had not already previously been with the Royal Naval Reserve, the required twenty-eight day training period, all or partially, was waived by 'Royal Proclamation'.**

(Right: A relatively new vessel, the 'Franconia' had been launched on July 23 of 1910. Remaining un-requisitioned as a troop transport until early 1915, it was to be well over a year later that on 4 October, 1916, while heading for Salonika, she was torpedoed and sunk by a German U-boat to the east of Malta She was not carrying any troops at the time, but out of her 314 crew members, 12 died. – the photograph is from Wikipedia)



Their ship then having docked in the English port-city of Liverpool on November 12, several of the Reservists were posted directly to a ship. Others were ordered to undergo further training at various Royal Navy establishments and, likely having journeyed by train, reported to these bases on or about November 13.

Thus, likely on the aforementioned November 13, Seaman Brace was...taken on strength...at HMS Excellent, the Royal Navy gunnery school located on Whale Island at the entrance to the harbour at Portsmouth. He was to train there until December 11 when he was ordered to join his ship, HMS Viknor, likely destined to man one of the guns with which by that time the ship had been fitted.

(Right: *The Royal Navy Memorial which stands on the coast at Portsmouth and from where may be seen Whale Island – photograph from 1917*)



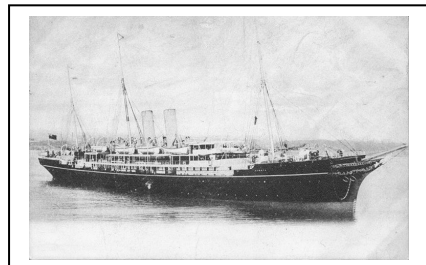
The Armed Merchant Cruiser *Viknor* was an elderly ship, obsolete and apparently under-powered with a top speed of only fourteen knots. In her earlier lives she had firstly been, as of 1888, the SS *Atrato*, before then having been re-named as the SS *Viking* in 1912. Upon the outbreak of the *Great War* in 1914 she had been requisitioned by the British Admiralty and baptized on a third occasion as HMS *Viknor*.

(Right: *Recruits at drill on a naval gun on Whale Island during the time of the Great War – from Wikipedia*)



At the time of Seaman-Gunner Brace's transfer to *Viknor*, the ship was apparently at the time based on the River Tyne. She was not to leave port until December 28 and not to join her squadron (see below) until January 1.

'*Viknor*' was to be attached to the 10th Cruiser Squadron, also known as the *Northern Patrol*, a force originally having comprised out-of-date warships which, unable to cope with the elements, by that January of 1915 had been replaced by requisitioned ocean-going passenger-liners carrying a few guns often as old as some of the ships on which they were mounted.



(Right above: *The luxury cruise-liner 'Atrato' seen here in her pre-War condition – from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site*)

The ships of the 10th 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 encompassed by Ireland, northern Scotland, the Shetlands and Iceland, a thankless job at the best of times: during the tempestuous winter months, even worse.

In early January the ships of the *Northern Patrol* stopped a Norwegian vessel, the *Bergensfjord*, and transferred a number of persons, one of them a suspected spy, to *Viknor*, she then being ordered to proceed to Liverpool.

From what is known about *Viknor*, she was hardly a vessel fit for the task at hand and January and February of 1915 were to apparently be particularly stormy. What is more, a German counterpart, the steamship *Berlin*, had recently been reported in the area sowing mines – one of which had already sunk the British battleship *Audacious* some three months before.

(continued)

It still remains a bit of a mystery as to what happened to *Viknor* although it appears to be that either she fell victim to the bad weather or that she was sunk by a mine. All that may be said with any great certainty is that there was not to be a single survivor: of the crew of three-hundred two, including twenty-five of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland), all were to perish*.

**Her wreck was found off the coast of County Donegal, Ireland, in the year 2006, but no firm conclusion was to come about as to the cause of the ship's sinking.*

The son of Richard Brace, fisherman, and of Mary Elizabeth Brace (née *Peddle**) of the Trinity Bay community of Chance Cove, Seaman Albert Brace was also brother to Sarah, Violet, George, Effie, Theresa, Rhoda, Flossie, Mary, to Albert (born in December of 1915), to William (born in 1919), and to William-James**.

**The couple had married in Chance Cove on April 7 of 1896.*

(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)

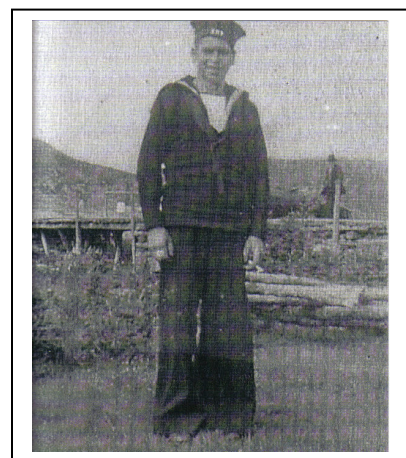
(Right: The un-detailed photograph of Seaman Albert Brace is from the Canadian Virtual War Memorial (Veterans' Affairs Canada).

Seaman-Gunner Albert Brace died on January 13, 1915, at the recorded age of twenty years: date of birth in Chance Cove, Newfoundland, September 29, 1896* (from Newfoundland Vital Statistics and the Newfoundland Birth Register).

**Royal Navy records, however, cite the year as having been 1895 (also see*below).*

Seaman Brace 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-Gunner Albert Brace was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



**His and his brother William James' birth dates appear to be confused. That of Albert is found in his enlistment papers as September 29, 1895 and in a copy of Vital Statistics as the same day but in 1896, while that of brother William James is recorded in his papers as*

February 1 of 1896. In the Canadian Virtual War Memorial he is also cited to be brother of both Albert and of James Joseph Brace, this last not to be found in other sources.

****Seaman William James Brace, Number 1479x, enlisted in December of 1914, some eleven weeks after his brother and departed on overseas service in early February of the next year.**

After two months of training and waiting for a posting he was transferred to HM Drifter 'Rooke', operating as a patrol vessel and minesweeper out of the small harbour and base of Ramsgate. He was to spend over a year a member of the ship's crew with nothing out of the routine reported.

However, just after mid-night on August 2-3 of 1916, 'Rooke' collided with a larger vessel and sank, six of her crew, Seaman Brace one of that number, being lost.

His remains were subsequently buried in Ramsgate and St. Lawrence Cemetery where they lie to this day (photograph from 2010).

His full story is to be found elsewhere among these files.



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.