



William James Brace, Seaman Number 1479x, lies in Ramsgate and St. Lawrence Cemetery in the English County of Kent: Grave reference LA. 593..

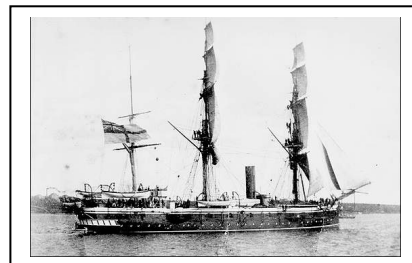
Having decided to *answer the call* of the naval authorities for volunteers, he thereupon travelled from Trinity Bay community of Chance Cove to St. John's*, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on December 14 of 1914, William James Brace reported...to duty...on the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that same December 14 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 a satisfactory medical examination on the morrow. He also likely attested at this time, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V.

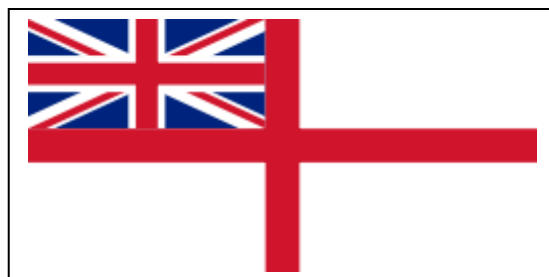
(Preceding page: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India: as a boy and young man he had served in the Royal Navy from 1877 until 1891 and always retained a fondness for 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 below: *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

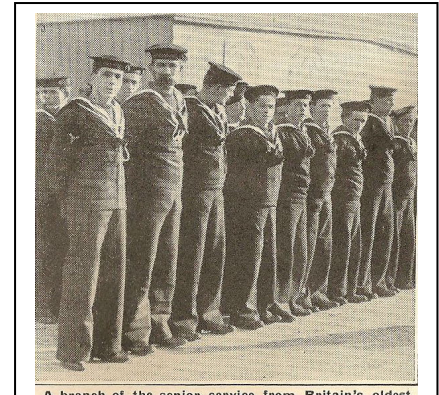
– mostly fishermen – were to opt to train during the winter months when fishing work was minimal.

(Right: 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.

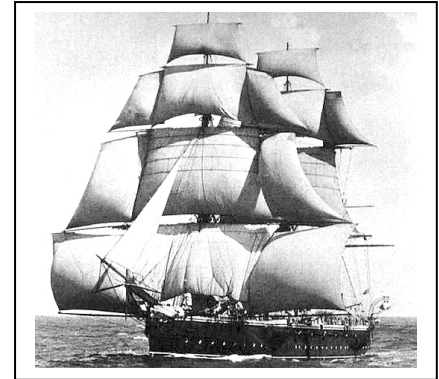
Of course, the purpose of having a reserve force at any time is to provide a trained force ready at any time to serve at a time of need or crisis. Thus in August of 1914, upon the Declaration of War by the government in London, hundreds of those men of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) were to make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



A branch of the senior service from Britain's oldest colony. Naval reservists before leaving Newfoundland to serve in the Empire's cause.

(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)

Four weeks after having first reported to *Calypso* in St. John's, on January 11 Seaman Brace was apparently promoted from the rank of Seaman Recruit to that of Seaman; three weeks and three days later again, on February 4 of that 1915, he was reportedly to depart from St. John's to cross the Atlantic – this suggested by the dates documented in his sparse service file.

(continued)

On that same 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, 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 it might be assumed that the Naval Reservists were to be a part of that contingent.



(Right above: *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.*)

The available sources do not, however, record any Newfoundland reservists taking passage on *Dominion*. In fact, *Calypso's* drill register of the time records that the naval personnel draft 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 18th.

The situation seems to have been a bit more complicated than that: Days before, according to the local newspapers, on that February 4-5, *Mongolian* had left St. John's to 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 returned to port.

In re-entering St. John's Harbour, however, the vessel 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 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 McDermott 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 18th 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.

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Shortly after leaving port rough and foggy weather was encountered and as ship proceeded East this weather became worse each day. On 22nd and 23rd 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.

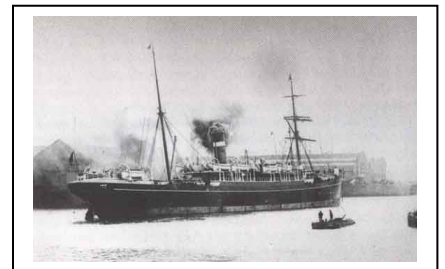
I would request, Sir, that you would be good enough to forward to His Excellency the Governor my appreciation for the assistance so ably rendered by him. I would also ask you to place on record my high opinion of Petty Officer George Gill and Armourer Luxon.

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 on preceding page) - in the United Kingdom in early March, any 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 Brace, the destination was to be HMS *Vivid* at Plymouth-Devonport on the English south coast.

Vivid I was a base and holding-barracks for regular seamen and it was therefore *Vivid I* to which Seaman Brace was to be attached, there to await a posting to one of His Majesty's ships.

**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 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.

HMS 'Vivid', the base to which Seaman Brace had been ordered after his arrival in the United Kingdom from Newfoundland, was not only all the buildings and facilities on shore, but also a small, elderly, nondescript depot ship (originally HMS 'Cukoo', built 1873), to which all the naval personnel was attached and was the name to be emblazoned on the bands of their caps.

These establishments were at times divided into sections: as has already been seen, 'Vivid I' was where the seamen (as opposed to the engine-room personnel, for example, in 'Vivid II') such as Seaman Brace were to be stationed.

(Right below: A main gateway to the once-Royal Navy establishment at Plymouth-Devonport – photograph from 2011(?))

Seaman Brace was to serve seventy-three days – at least nominally - at *Vivid I*. On April 19 he was internally transferred, apparently to spend thirty-two days in the *Trawler Reserve Section* as a deck-hand as several of his fellow Newfoundland reservists were to do, although there is no record of him having set foot on the deck of any ship at any time during this period.



That was soon to change: on May 22 he crossed the country and reported to HMS *Ceto*, the base in the coastal town of Ramsgate from which harbour operated some of the ships of the *Dover Patrol*.

Prior to the *Great War*, Ramsgate had been a popular seaside destination and it had also been a thriving fishing centre, both of which had suffered hugely because of German U-boat activity, mine-laying and, later, bombing raids. It was in order to counter the submarines and mines that the Admiralty created the *Dover Patrol* for which it requisitioned a number of fishing-boats, drifters and tugs, armed them, and placed Navy personnel on board.



(Right above: *Drifters and other small vessels lined up at the quay-side of Ramsgate Harbour during the early days of the Great War – from the Imperial War Museum web-site...livesofthefirstworldwar.iwm.org.uk*)

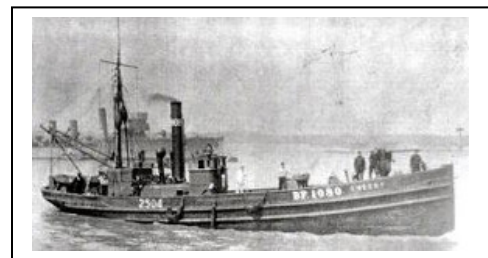
Thus HMS *Ceto* came into being at Ramsgate, a base where, as seen above, Seaman Brace was to be...*taken on strength*...on that same May 22 of 1915.

At some point after having reported to HMS *Ceto*, Seaman Brace was to change cap-bands once more when he became a crew-member of a drifter, HMS *Rooke*, a vessel at times engaged in the search for and the destruction of enemy mines. The small drifter was to be his posting for the following seven months.



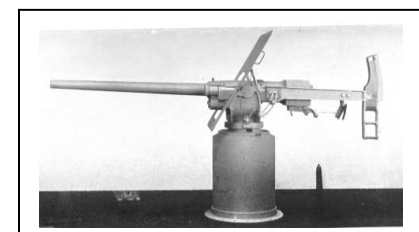
(Right: *Minelaying from a German surface vessel during the Great War: these were for the most part contact mines. U-boats were also used for this purpose – from the NavWeaps web-site*)

There was nothing particularly conspicuous about *Rooke*. Perhaps constructed mainly of wood, she was just another hired drifter, Admiralty Number 1. She had been built in 1908, weighed some eighty-four tons and had been registered as LT.53. in the fishing town of Yarmouth further up the coast. No longer simply a fishing-boat, she was to carry armament: a single six-pounder gun.



(Right above: *The Royal Navy Drifter 'Cheery' - which was to survive the conflict - of the same class of vessel as 'Rooke', the photograph showing a small gun mounted on her fore-deck – photograph from Wikipedia*)

(Right: *A Quick-Firing Hotchkiss six-pounder gun such as may have been mounted, as shown in the above image, on the fore-deck of the drifter 'Rooke'. – from Wikipedia*)



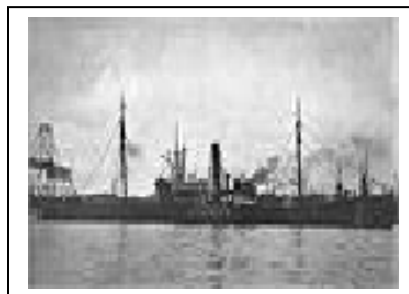
Those months spent on Board *Rooke* during the latter part of the year 1915 apparently passed without incident other than the routines of each day. The harbour of Ramsgate is situated on the estuary of the River Thames, and on December 14 Seaman Brace was sent further upstream to the naval town of Chatham to spend sixteen days at *Pembroke I*, another naval establishment, until such time as his services were to be called upon again by His Majesty.

On the penultimate day of that year, December 30, he was...*struck off strength*...at *Pembroke I* and returned to his base, HMS *Ceto* and also to his former ship, HM Drifter *Rooke*.

(Right: *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 since been transformed into a university campus. – photograph from 2010*)



The Downs is a historic place of anchorage off the coastal town of Deal in Kent still used to this day. At the mouth of the River Thames where it empties into the juncture of the North Sea and *Dover Straits*, it was a busy place even in time of war and for vessels of the *Dover Patrol* its supervision and protection was a part of those ships' duties.



Thus *Rooke* was there at work during the night of August 2-3.

There appears to have been no enemy activity reported at the time. However, at half-past mid-night the eighty-four ton *Rooke* was in collision with the SS *Mereddio*, a Swedish ship of just under fourteen-hundred tons.

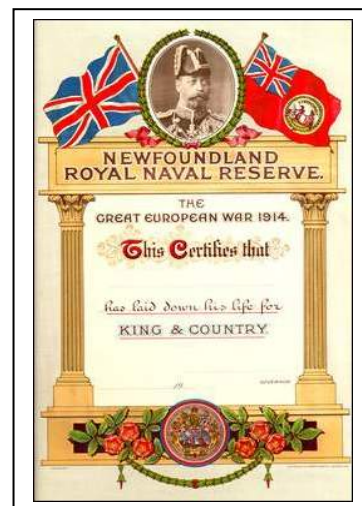
(Right above: *A poor-quality photograph of the Swedish-owned Mereddio, on December 20 of that same 1916 she was to be torpedoed and sunk by UB-34 although on this occasion there was to be no loss of life. – The image is from the wrecksite.eu web-site.*)

It was no contest. *Rooke* was lost as were six of her crew, one of them Seaman Brace.

The son of Richard Brace, fisherman, and of Mary Elizabeth Brace (née *Peddle**) of the Trinity Bay community of Chance Cove, Seaman William-James 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 Albert**.

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

(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)

(continued)

Seaman-Gunner William James Brace drowned on August 3 of 1916 at the recorded age of twenty years: recorded* 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 further below.*

(Right: The photograph of Seaman William James Brace is from the Canadian Virtual War Memorial of Veterans' Affairs Canada. - It would appear that his cap-band bears the name of HMD 'Rooke'.)



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



**His own and his brother Albert's 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, William James, is also cited to be brother of both Albert and of James Joseph Brace, this last not to be found in other sources.*

***Seaman Albert Brace, Number 1219x, also died at sea during the War. Having enlisted on September 30 of 1914 he departed on overseas service in November of that year to be ordered to HMS 'Excellent', the Navy's gunnery school.*

A month of training finished, he was thereupon posted to a ship on December 11-12.

The ship was the ill-starred 'Viknor', an elderly passenger vessel reconverted for use as an armed merchant cruiser. Only a single month after Seaman-Gunner Brace had reported to her, on January 13, 1916, she sank off the Irish coast, victim to either a German mine or the foul weather.



There were no survivors. Having no known last resting-place, Seaman Brace is commemorated beneath the Caribou at Beaumont Hamel.

His 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.