



Seaman George Philip Bragg, Number 1560x, is interred on the Mediterranean Greek island of Limnos (also found as *Lemnos*) in the East Mudros Military Cemetery: Grave reference, II. H. 129..

Having decided to *answer the call*, George Philip Bragg relinquished his occupation as a fisherman in the south-west Newfoundland area of Channel and Port aux Basques, and travelled across the island to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on January 18 of 1915, he reported...*to duty*...on board the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below) and was...*taken on strength*.

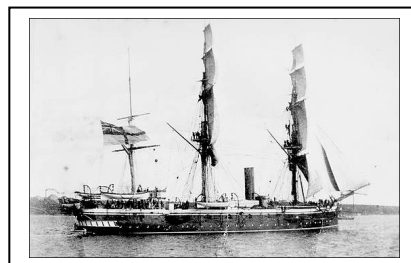


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On that same January 18 he enlisted for the first time into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for a single year's war-time service* and on the morrow underwent a satisfactory medical assessment. He also likely attested at this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

(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: *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.

(Preceding page: 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.

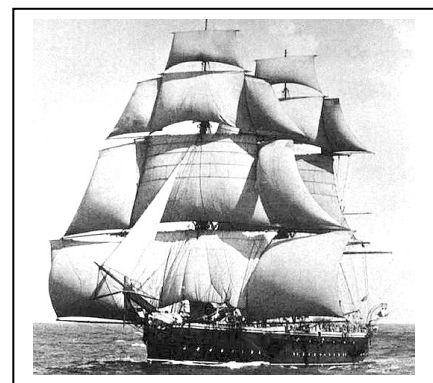
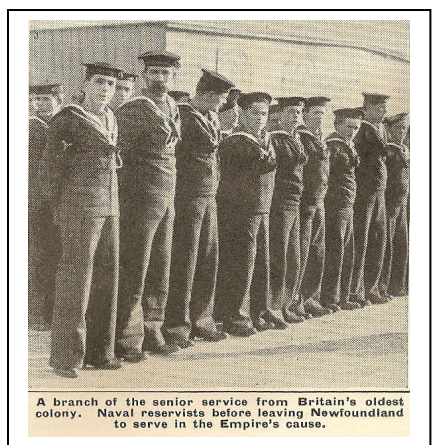
Of course, the purpose of having a reserve force at any time is to provide a trained force ready at any time to serve at a time of need or crisis. Thus in August of 1914, upon the Declaration of War by the government in London, hundreds of those men of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) were to make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

(Right: 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: 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)

A mere two weeks and three days after having first reported to Calypso in St. John's, on February 4 – at this point having been promoted from the rank of Seaman Recruit – the now-Seaman Bragg was to depart from St. John's to cross the Atlantic – at least this appears suggested by the dates documented in his sparse service file.



On that date, 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 naval reservists taking passage on *Dominion*. In fact, *Calypso's* drill register of the time records that the personnel were 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.

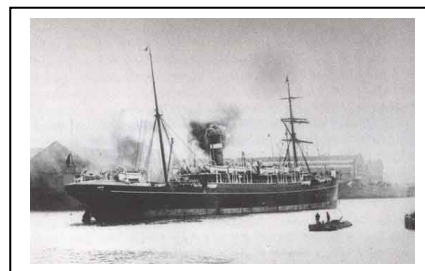
I would request, Sir, that you would be good enough to forward to His Excellency the Governor my appreciation for the assistance so ably rendered by him. I would also ask you to place on record my high opinion of Petty Officer George Gill and Armourer Luxon.

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 *Mongolian* 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 Bragg, the destination was to be *Pembroke I* at Chatham in the English county of Kent.

HMS *Pembroke** was the naval establishment at Chatham on the River Medway, itself a tributary of the better-known River Thames, and in the county of Kent. Not only was it a barracks – it operated from 1878 until 1983 – but it was the name given to a number of subsidiary training establishments, mostly not far-removed from Chatham, which were numbered according to the training involved.

Pembroke I was the base for regular seamen and, as seen above, it was to *Pembroke I* that Seaman Bragg would be attached, there to await a posting to one of His Majesty's ships.

**During its history – and before - there had also been a series of ships named 'Pembroke', the last several of which were to be used as depot ships and for harbour service at Chatham. This is the 'HMS Pembroke' found on the cap-bands of those who served there, perhaps in their thousands, but many of whom 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.

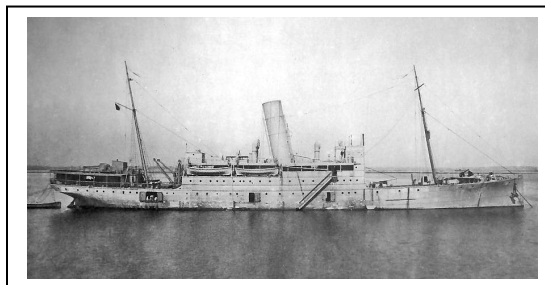
Thus the presence of elderly and obsolescent vessels that plied the waters adjacent to the many naval land establishments which were known as stone frigates. The ships were in theory the home ships of the tens, hundreds, even thousands of men who laboured on shore.

Which is why Seaman Bragg would likely have worn an HMS 'Pembroke' hat-band – until he joined HMS 'Carron'.



(Right above: 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)

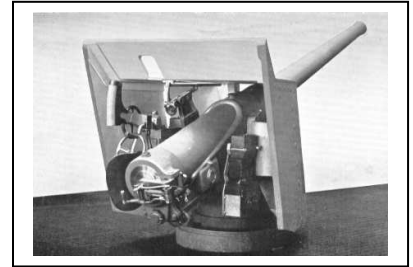
When eventually Seaman Bragg was to join his new ship appears not to have been recorded among the very limited documentation available although the vessel in question was to be the Armed Boarding Steamer *Carron*.



(Right: The image of the steamer SS 'Carron', owned by the Company of the same name, is from the following web-site: www.clydeships.co.uk)

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The ship had been built and launched in Scotland in 1909. A small vessel for carrying both passengers and cargo, she was to be requisitioned by the Admiralty soon after the outbreak of the Great War to be converted for carrying out inspections of foreign shipping at sea, stopping them and boarding them if deemed necessary. To that end she was fitted with two 4.7-inch naval guns on her forward area before going into her war-time service on November 22 of 1914.



(Right above: *An example of the naval guns with which 'Carron' had been equipped prior to sailing on her war-time duties. – from Wikipedia*)

Her first duties had been to patrol the waters of the Western Approaches to the English Channel and it may have been during this period of several months that Seaman Bragg became a member of her crew. What appears to be certain is that by April of 1915 he was on board ship when *Carron* set sail to take up station in the Aegean Sea towards the eastern end of the Mediterranean.

The British and the French were by that time becoming embroiled in a campaign against the Ottoman Empire (the Turks) which had recently entered the *Great War* on the side of Germany and Austria. To the Allies this episode of the conflict became known as the *Dardanelles* or *Gallipoli* and to the Turks as *Çanakkale*, and was an attempt by force to take control of the waterway from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea and the Turkish capital city of the time, Istanbul – known to history as *Byzantium* before *Constantinople* – which lies on that channel, the *Bosphorus*.

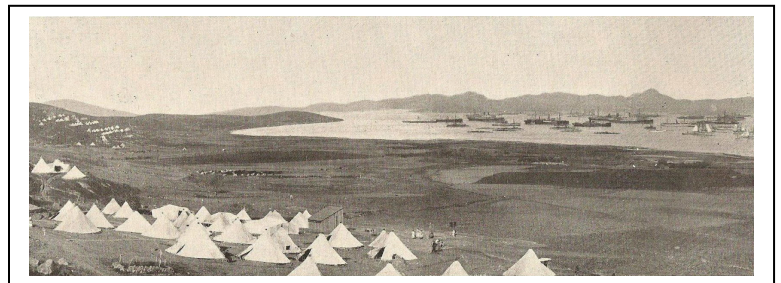
Not only was Newfoundland naval personnel to be involved at *Gallipoli* but the Newfoundland Regiment also played a role at a place called *Suvla Bay*. To say that the entire affair was not a great success would be to understate the situation but that is another story to be told elsewhere.



(Right above: *Azmak Cemetery at 'Suvla Bay' wherein lie twelve dead of the Newfoundland Regiment – photograph from 2011*)

Both sides were to incur many casualties but there were apparently to be more victims from disease rather than from enemy action.

Such was to be the case of Seaman Bragg.



The British and the French had imposed their collective will upon the Greek government – neutral at the time – and had established a large base on the Greek island of Lemnos (also found as *Limnos*) and particularly around *Mudros Bay*.

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There the Allies were to establish amongst its other facilities several large medical complexes, one of which was where, in August of 1915, Seaman Bragg was to be hospitalized.

(Preceding page: *This is Mudros Bay on the Greek island of Lemnos where in the spring of 1915 the French and the British established their Advanced Base for the attack on the Gallipoli Peninsula. Most of the tents seen are hospitals, casualty clearing stations and other medical facilities, and likely a number of hospital ships was among the vessels seen anchored in the waters of Mudros Bay. – the image from Illustration*)



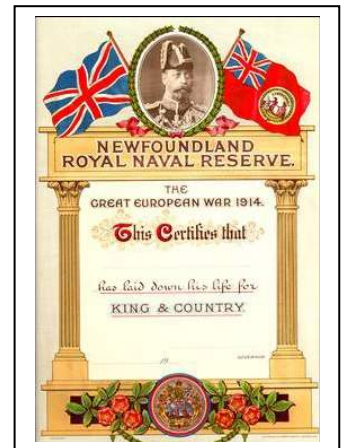
(Right above: *Before and after the Gallipoli Campaign this area was entirely empty, fishing huts and a decrepit wooden wharf the only evidence of human activity, much as it still is to this day. – Photograph from 2011*)

There appear to be no details of Seaman Bragg's illness other than that it was a case of dysentery, the scourge of a large number of the combatants on both sides of the Gallipoli Campaign.

The son of Emmanuel Bragg, fisherman, and of Catharine (found also as *Catherine, Katherine and Kathleen*) Bragg (née *Hulen*, also found as *Hulan* and *Huelin*), he was also brother to Emmanuel, William-J. (the oldest, born 1879), John-Albert, Ellen, Annie, Laura-Letitia, Maraih-J. (sic), Edwin-Theadore (sic), Ethel-Maria, Cecil-Claude, Arthur-Gower, to Richard-Norman and to Ellenor (sic).

Seaman Bragg was reported as having...*died of disease (dysentery)*...on August 23 of 1915.

(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*)



George Philip (also found as *Philis*) Kirk Bragg died at the reported age of twenty years: date of birth in Channel-Port aux Basques, Newfoundland, August 30, 1895 (from the British Army and Navy Birth, Marriage and Death Records), but September 30, 1895 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register and also from his Enlistment records).

(Right: *The photograph of Seaman George Philip Bragg in uniform – although his cap-band is illegible - is from the Canadian Virtual War Memorial of Veterans' Affairs Canada.*)



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Seaman Bragg 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 George Philip Bragg 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.