



SEAMAN A. BRINSTON
NEW FOUNDLAND ROYAL NAVAL RESERVE 17.1921

1914 + 1939
1918 + 1945
THOSE HONOURED
HERE DIED IN THE
SERVICE OF THEIR
COUNTRY AND LIE
BURIED ELSEWHERE
IN NEWFOUNDLAND
AND LABRADOR



Seaman Allison (found also as *Alison*) Allington Brinston (found also as *Brinton*), Number 803x, lies in the Old United Church Cemetery in the community of North Harbour, Placentia Bay, Newfoundland.

Having been summoned to honour his commitments to the Crown by the Naval Authorities, Allison Allington Brinston was to relinquish his occupation, likely as a fisherman, and to travel from North Harbour, Placentia Bay, to St. John's, capital city of

the Dominion of Newfoundland. On August 15 of 1914 he reported...*to duty*...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

Allison Allington Brinston had already enlisted in the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) just less than four years prior to this time, in 1910. HMS *Calypso*'s Drill Register shows him as having undertaken a first training period of twenty-eight days from November 10 until December 7 of that same year. He had thereupon committed himself to a five-year service period which was to comprise in all a total of five of those training sessions. He apparently completed four of them of which the last recorded was in November and December of 1912.

Some nineteen months later, the events of the summer of 1914 dictated that he be summoned to honour his commitment to the Reserve and report...*to duty*.

At that time he was likely to have undergone a medical assessment, perhaps to commence a further twenty-eight days of training and, if he had not previously done so, would have pledged his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V. Thus he prepared for war-time service.

(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.)

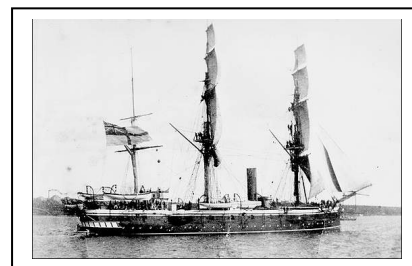


**At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist. Later recruits – 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.*



(continued)

(Preceding page: 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)

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.

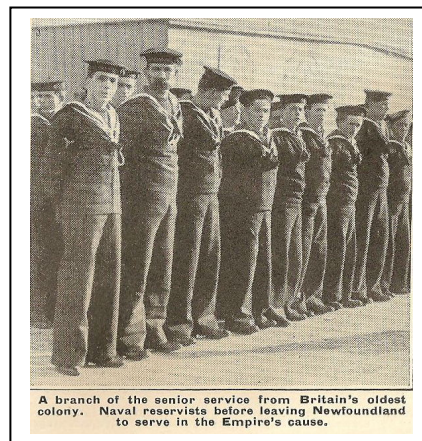
Just fewer than four-hundred men were sought to enroll as seamen – apparently automatically at the rank of Able Seaman - and to present themselves annually in St. John’s for five years in order to train for a period of twenty-eight days per annum. Allowed to report at a time of their own choosing, it 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.



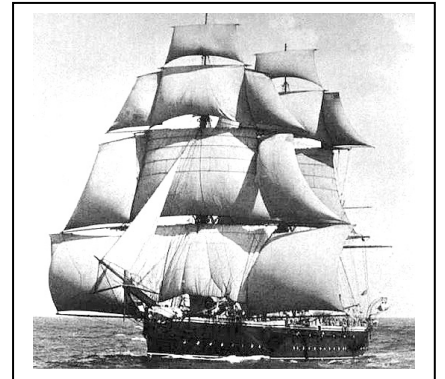
A branch of the senior service from Britain's oldest colony. Naval reservists before leaving Newfoundland to serve in the Empire's cause.

(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, 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.

(Right: HMS 'Calypso' in full sail. She was to be re-named 'Briton' in 1916 when a new 'Calypso', a modern cruiser, was on the point of being launched by the Royal Navy. – This photograph, taken by the Royal Navy in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum.)



At some time during the period of thirty-two days following his arrival there was confirmation of Herbert Somerton's rank as seaman. As seen above, he had already undergone the mandatory training on five occasions during previous years so what his duties were to be during those several weeks is not certain.

But on September 5 he was to be seconded to the fledgling Royal Canadian Navy and to board the cruiser HMCS *Niobe* which at the time was in St. John's Harbour awaiting a detachment of the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve.

(Right: 'Niobe', seen here in St. John's Harbour, was ceded by Great Britain to Canada on September 6 of 1910 to be the country's main naval vessel on its east coast. Superfluous to Royal Navy needs, she was an elderly... '1st Class Armoured Diadem Cruiser'...of eleven-thousand tons, armed with numerous guns, thirty-two altogether, and two torpedo-tubes.



However, by October of 1915 'Niobe' was worn out, to be disarmed and relegated to the role of harbour-service and headquarters ship in the harbour at Halifax - see below). – from the collection of William Herbert Rose and Marmaduke Rose (by Courtesy of Bud (Donald Rose) and found in the For Posterity's sake – an RCN Historical Project web-site)



(Right: A naval tender carry Newfoundland Reservists from HMS 'Calypso' to HMCS 'Niobe*'. – The photograph by The Evening Telegram dated September 30, 1914, is from the Provincial Archives.)

****Some sources refer to the ship – in 1914 - as HMS 'Niobe', but she had already been re-commissioned as HMCS 'Niobe', on September 6, 1910, for almost four years.***

On the date on which the detachment of just over one-hundred Newfoundland Reservists* was to join the ship's complement, September 5, HMCS *Niobe* was to officially commence her war-time service.**

****They were apparently needed as, when Niobe was being re-fitted and readied for war, many of her crew had been ordered to Canada's west coast and were unavailable when the ship herself had been prepared to sail after her repairs.***

*****Some Reservists – apparently including Seaman Brinston - are recorded on their service records as having joined HMCS ‘Niobe’ on October 15 but this is highly unlikely as ‘Niobe’ had contact with two Royal Navy ships off New York as late as a quarter past six on the evening of October 13 and then on mid-day of October 16. Moreover, the Discharge Register of HMS ‘Calypso’ documents that September 5 was indeed the date on which some of these men joined ‘Niobe’ – the records of the others appear to be incomplete in the register.***

The one hundred names of those Naval Reservists seconded to ‘Niobe’ are found in the October 15 edition of at least two local newspapers of the time, but that is all: nowhere is there any further information to be found pertaining to these men.

Various other sources cite the vessel leaving Halifax on September 1, 1914, for St. John’s, Newfoundland, to embark (Royal) Naval Reservists from there. At fifteen minutes past eight on that September 9, HMCS ‘Niobe’ sailed back into Halifax Harbour.

HMCS *Niobe*’s first duty after having absorbed the Newfoundland Reservists into her crew was on September 10 to 14 to escort the Royal Canadian Regiment during its passage from Halifax to Hamilton, capital city of Bermuda, where it was to become the island’s garrison. This mission accomplished, the ship sailed northwards to patrol the waters of the Cabot Strait and the Straits of Belle Isle, a task she shared with a Royal Navy cruiser, HMS *Lancaster*.

Following this episode of but a few weeks, by mid-October of 1914 she was working with the Royal Navy’s 4th Cruiser Squadron, also known as *Force ‘H’*, which was responsible for the inspection of shipping off the east coast of the United States and as far south as the West Indies.

The United States was a neutral country at the time – she did not join the conflict until April of 1917 – and thus this patrolling and policing of the western Atlantic was the burden of the Royal Navy during the first years of the *Great War*, as was the blockading of German shipping in American harbours. The job involved intercepting merchant ships of all flags, the inspection of cargoes and at times the boarding and the escorting thereof under armed guard of suspect shipping to an Allied – or Associated – port.

This often also involved a great deal of boredom with the exception, perhaps, of the few days – every three weeks or so – when the patrol ships put into Halifax or, less often, Bermuda for re-fuelling and the replenishment of other supplies.

HMCS *Niobe* was already an elderly ship and the continuous effort of those several months resulted in an elderly *worn-out* ship. Thus when she returned to Halifax in July of 1915, it was decided that she should remain there to become a depot ship and headquarters for the other, smaller, ships of the Royal Canadian Navy on Canada’s east coast. She was to remain in Halifax for the remainder of the conflict.

The Newfoundlanders of the Royal Naval Reserve were then to return to St. John’s to serve on HMS *Calypso*, some for only a short period of duty, before being dispatched overseas to the United Kingdom and thence to ships of the Royal Navy.

Seaman Brinston's Service Record shows that he was put back on the nominal roll of HMS *Calypso* on September 1 of 1915 – although this may have been partially only on paper. Some three weeks later he was on his way once more.

He was a seaman of the draft of one-hundred forty-four Royal Navy Reserve personnel which was to travel across the island of Newfoundland to Port-aux-Basques likely overnight on September 23-24, 1915. The detachment then embarked on the Reid Newfoundland vessel, the SS *Kyle*, for passage to North Sydney where the ship docked on the morrow, September 25, at ten minutes past five in the morning.



(Right above: *The SS Kyle, an important element of Newfoundland's history, is seen here beached at the western extreme of the harbour in Harbour Grace. –photograph from 2012*)

From there the Reservists were to travel by the *Inter-Continental Railway* to Québec City where they would be taken on board the SS *Sicilian* arriving from Montreal on her commercial route across the Atlantic to Liverpool.

(Right below: *The image of the SS Sicilian at anchor(?) just off-shore is from the WikiTree web-site.*)

It was likely at the end of the first week of October, 1915, and having disembarked in the afore-mentioned English port-city, that the Naval Reservists would thereupon have been either dispatched directly to a vessel or ordered to undergo further training – or otherwise to simply await a posting to one of His Majesty's ships - at one of various Royal Navy establishments, these for the most part operating around the coast of England.



In the case of Seaman Brinston, not having immediately been attached to a vessel, *Pembroke I* (see below) was the establishment to which he was directed and where he was to remain until almost the end of the fourth week of November of that year – although exactly what his occupations, apart from waiting, were to be during this period of wearing a cap-band emblazoned *HMS Pembroke* has not been made clear.

**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 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, thousands of men who laboured on shore.

(Right: A part 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)



Following some two months' service at HMS *Pembroke* – apparently what exactly that service entailed has not been recorded – Seaman Brinston, so the records suggest, was to serve – from January 2, 1916, until December 31 of the same year, on HMS *Osiris II*, an elderly passenger-cargo ship, by April of 1916, having been a fleet-messenger ship, in use as a trawler depot ship, apparently in the Eastern Mediterranean as she was recognized for her role in the Dardanelles (Gallipoli) Campaign.



On January 1 of 1917, Seaman Brinston was again attached to 'Pembroke I' where he was to remain until April 26.

At this point he was...*taken on strength*...by HMS *Briton* (ex-*Calypso*) back in Newfoundland, although when he was to set foot on home soil is not clear. Perhaps he had already been exhibiting some of the symptoms of the malsdy to which he would eventually succumb.

He surely reached home at some time before May 13 of that 1917 as that is the date on which his service on HMS *Briton* is documented as having terminated – the term...*invalided*...is used.

Having thus survived the conflict, Seaman Brinston returned home and on January 7, 1919, he married Susie, his brother's widow with whom he was to parent two children. This was to be her third marriage.

The son of Robert William Brinston, fisherman, and of Amelia Jane Brinston (née *Giles**, deceased March 3, 1921) of Sound Island, Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Leslie-Atheling**, Reginald-Allison (died young), Cecilia-Blanche (died young), Reginald-Gordon, George-Clement*** and to Elizabeth – M..

***Robert William Brinston and Amelia Jane Giles were married in the Parish of Sound Island, Placentia Bay, on December 10, 1885.**

**** (Right: Seaman Leslie H.(?) Brinston shares this family memorial in the Bethel United Church Cemetery in North Harbour with his brother George, Private of the Newfoundland Regiment who fell on October 9, 1917, during Passchendaele. His story is elsewhere in these files as is that of George. – photograph from 2022)**

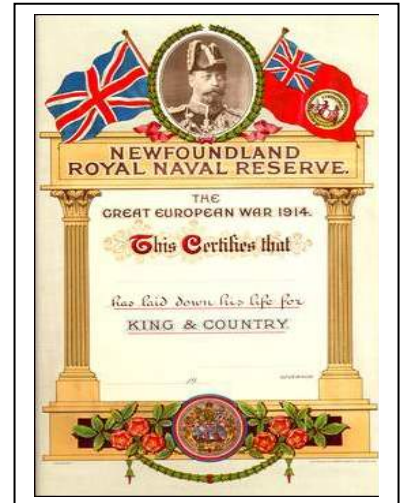


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Allison Allington Brinston died of *consumption* at the age of thirty years on July 1, 1921: date of birth in the Parish of Sound Island, May 12, 1893 (from a copy of Newfoundland Vital Statistics).

Seaman Brinston served only in the Royal Navy and was seconded to the Royal Canadian Navy on HMCS 'Niobe', but was neither a sailor of the Royal Canadian Navy - nor a Canadian - as is cited in some sources, notably the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

(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: It is nor recorded if or not his family was to receive this memento.)



Seaman Allison Allington Brinston was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



(First page: Seaman Allison Allington Brinston is also commemorated on the Screen Wall in the Mount Pleasant Cemetery in St. John's, Newfoundland. – photograph from 2010)

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.