



Seaman John Burrage, Number 1789x, is buried in Cobh* Old Church Cemetery, County Cork, in the Republic of Ireland.

****Cobh (pronounced 'Cove') is the present-day name for the town and harbour of Queenstown of the British era in the country.***

(continued)

Having relinquished his occupation, likely that of a fisherman, in the community of New Perlican, and having travelled from there to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on May 26 of 1915 John Burrage reported...*to duty...*at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that same May 26, 1915, 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 at the same moment. He also possibly 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.

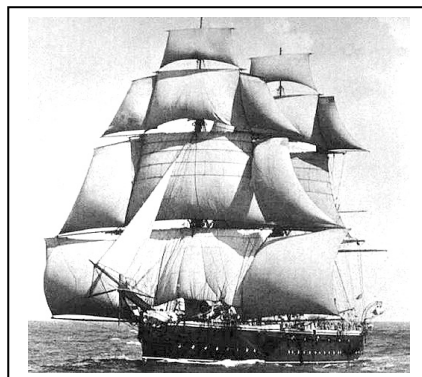
Just fewer than four-hundred men were sought to enroll as seamen – apparently automatically at the rank of Able Seaman - and to present themselves annually in St. John's for five years in order to train for a period of twenty-eight days per annum. Allowed to report at a time of their own choosing, it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

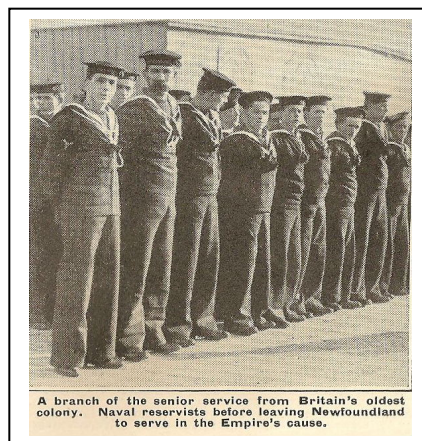
Of course, the purpose of having a reserve force at any time is to provide a trained force ready at any time to serve at a time of need or crisis. Thus in August of 1914, upon the Declaration of War by the government in London, hundreds of those men of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) were to make 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.



(Right: 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. – The Royal Navy photograph dated 1898 is by courtesy of the Admiralty House Museum)

Only three days* after having been...taken on strength...at 'Calypso', his sparse Service Records suggest that it was on May 29, having by that time been promoted from the rank of Seaman Recruit, that the now-Seaman Burrage was on his way to the United Kingdom.



*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 oft-times waived.

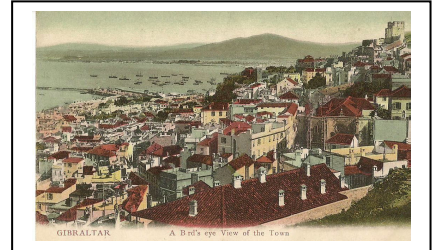
(Right above: Naval reservists from Newfoundland, during the early days of the Great War, before their departure for the United Kingdom - from *The War Illustrated*)

However, the Discharge Register of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) records that Seaman John Burrage was to board the armed merchant cruiser HMS *Calgarian* in St. John's Harbour as one of a draft of some eighty-five reservists, on the twentieth day of that June* - it was the seventeenth - and in the company of the two-hundred forty-two men and officers of 'F' Company of the Newfoundland Regiment on their way to Scotland.



(Preceding page: *The photograph of Newfoundland military personnel in tenders on their way to board 'Calgarian' is from the Provincial Archives. 'Calgarian' was not a requisitioned troop transport but in September of 1914 had been taken over by the British government to serve as an armed merchant-cruiser. She did, however, as on this occasion, at times carry troops and civilian passengers across the Atlantic. She was later torpedoed and sunk by U-19 off the north of Ireland on March 1, 1918.*)

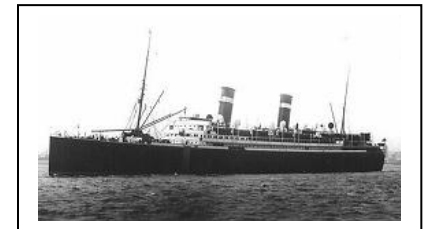
**Apparently the ship took nineteen days to make what was usually the journey of about a week. Not only was 'Calgarian' escorting four submarines, but she sailed by way of the Portuguese Azores and then Gibraltar – some of the Newfoundlanders apparently even having the time to cross the straits to spend a few hours in North Africa. She reached Liverpool on July 9 (See immediately below).*



(Right above: *The British Crown Colony of Gibraltar in pre-Great War days: The Spanish mainland is in the background beyond the harbour and Royal Navy dockyard. – from a vintage postcard*)

Here follows the account of HMS *Calgarian* and her trans-Atlantic crossing of June 20 to July 9, 1915...

The armed merchant cruiser HMS 'Calgarian' arrived in St. John's Harbour from Halifax at about six o'clock in the morning of June 17, anchored and almost immediately began coaling. Her log suggests that she had sailed alone rather than in the company of the submarines (see below) since at times 'Calgarian' had been doing sixteen knots and the submarines' top speed was only thirteen.



(Right above: *The photograph of the SS 'Calgarian' is from the naval-history.net web-site.*)

At about five-fifteen of that same evening of June 17 the personnel of 'F' Company of the Newfoundland Regiment came on board as well as eighty-seven naval reservists and a single petty officer.

June 18 was to be spent transferring stores to HMS 'Calgarian' and completing the coaling of the ship. On this day is first mentioned the SS 'Glenalmond', a smaller cargo ship which was to accompany 'Calgarian' across the Atlantic to Gibraltar, the vessel from which some of the above-mentioned stores were to be drawn, and on which a small detachment of eight naval reservists and some few more senior ranks were to travel.

Also noted for the first time in the log of that June 18 was one – the vessel H2 - of the apparently four submarines – 'H1', 'H2', 'H3' and 'H4' - which were to be escorted across the ocean. They had presumably already made the journey from Montreal where they had been built to St. John's where they had been awaiting 'Calgarian'. Where exactly the SS 'Glenalmond' fits into the picture is not clear unless she was the submarines' depot ship or acting as an ocean-going tug.

'Calgarian' sailed out of St. John's Harbour at ten minutes past ten on the morning of June 20, 1915, at a speed of ten – then lowered to eight – knots. This had surely been to allow the submarines, otherwise un-mentioned, to keep pace with the larger vessel.

Proceeding at a reduced rate of speed, often about eight and a half knots, it was not until the afternoon of June 26 that the small convoy of HMS 'Calgarian', SS 'Glenalmond' and the four small submarines reached 'Flores Island' in the Portuguese Azores. During those days 'Calgarian' had been towing Submarine 'H3', at times its crew being required to repair a broken towline.

The remainder of the afternoon and early evening was spent anchored off 'Flores Island' with the submarines in turn drawing alongside to take on fuel (diesel oil) and supplies. It was a task soon accomplished and – after 'H3's towing-line had once more been repaired – the ships were on their way again at a speed of nine knots just after ten o'clock on that same evening of June 26.



(Preceding page: 'Delgado Point' on 'Flores Island', close to where the convoy anchored, and then past which it sailed on June 26, 1915 – photograph from the cruisemapper.com)

*It was not to be until the late morning of July 3 that they arrived at the British possession of Gibraltar situated at the narrow entrance to the Mediterranean Sea. This was to be where HMS 'Calgarian' would part ways with 'Glenalmond' – her eight naval reservists and five higher ranks to transfer immediately to 'Calgarian'**.

**The four submarines were now to enter the Mediterranean Sea and proceed to the island of Malta from where they were to operate for the remainder of the Great War – except for H3 which would strike a mine a year later, on July 15, 1916, and be lost with all on board.*



(Right: The photograph of 'H4' in Brindisi Harbour in August of 1916 is from Wikipedia.)

Two days only were spent in Gibraltar although a number of those on board were able to leave the ship for 'liberty' on July 4. On July 5, having taken on board coal, supplies and a number of German prisoners-of-war, the ship sailed at eight o'clock in the evening and for the first time in some two weeks was able to proceed at a speed greater than ten knots. She was now en route to Liverpool.

There she arrived without incident of July 9 and at ten minutes past eight of the following morning, HMS 'Calgarian's' record-keeper documented... "Clypso" (sic) Boys left ship.

(The above has been adapted from the log-book of the armed merchant cruiser HMS 'Calgarian' for the period of June 13, 1915, to July 9, 1915.)

On July 10 of that 1916, *Calgarian* having docked in Liverpool, the Naval Reserve personnel would thereupon have been either posted directly to a ship or ordered to undergo further training – or 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.

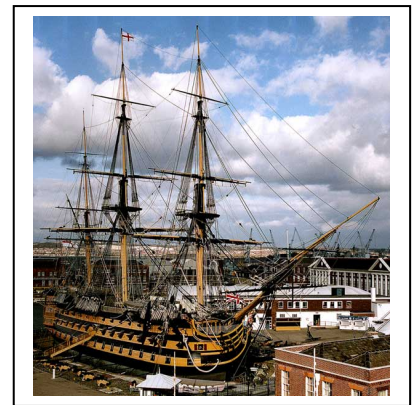
In the case of Seaman Burrage, not having immediately been attached to a vessel, *HMS Victory I* (see below) was the establishment to which he was directed and where he was to remain until August 13 of the New Year, 1916 – although exactly what his occupations, apart from waiting, were to be during this period of wearing a cap-band emblazoned *HMS Victory* is not clear.

HMS ‘Victory’, like most of the so-called stone-frigates (naval establishments on shore), was three entities: it was a training establishment originally, and also a holding-barracks for seamen not only in training but awaiting a posting to one of His Majesty’s ships, its facilities initially set in the naval city and port of Portsmouth; thirdly, it was also the ship to which the majority of the land-based personnel would have been, at least officially and bureaucratically – if not physically - attached**.*

At Portsmouth this vessel was HMS ‘Victory’, the warship from which Admiral Nelson had directed the Battle of Trafalgar – although her illustrious history is not limited to that one single incident.

**The large influx of personnel due to the War necessitated further Divisions and functions being transferred to other areas of the United Kingdom.*

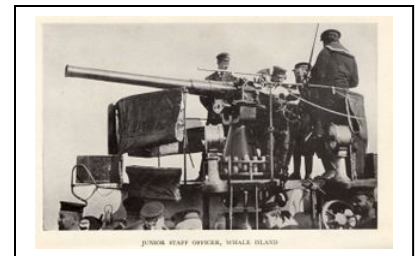
(Right: HMS ‘Victory’ in dry dock in the southern English port-city of Portsmouth where she has been for a century – photograph from Wikipedia)



***Naval discipline differed in some ways from civil and even Army law, and those in naval uniform, even though based on land and perhaps never to go to sea, had to be on the books of a real ship for that discipline to be applied. Thus a normally small, obsolescent and obscure vessel – ‘Victory’ was the exception - was used for this purely bureaucratic purpose.*

After thirty-four days of service at *Victory I*, on August 13-14 Seaman Burrage was transferred to nearby *Whale Island* from where on a fine day Portsmouth Harbour is visible.

**HMS ‘Excellent’ was the name – and also still is the name - of the Royal Navy’s Gunnery School which had been established in a ship of the same name in 1829, the vessel being permanently moored just outside Portsmouth dockyard. As the years passed the ships were to be replaced, but each in turn was to be named HMS ‘Excellent’.*



(Preceding page: *Recruits at drill on a naval gun on 'Whale Island' during the period of the Great War – from Wikipedia*)

And as the years passed, the use evolved of the nearby 'Whale (originally 'Whaley') Island' as facilities were constructed on it. In 1885 the Gunnery School was moved from the ship of the time to be re-established on the island itself.



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

Which is why Seaman Burrage during this time would have worn an HMS *Excellent* cap-band.

After only a mere ten days of learning how the Royal Navy's armaments worked, Seaman Burrage was once again placed on the books of HMS *Victory I*; on this occasion his tenure there was to last from August 25, 1915, until March 18 of 1916.

On that March 19 he was once more transferred out of Portsmouth Harbour and back to *Whale Island* and to HMS *Excellent* whereupon, when a further sixty-two days had passed, he was yet again to be transferred: to a further Royal Navy shore-based establishment.

Thus it would appear from Seaman Burrage's Service Records, admittedly sparse, that apart from the prolonged crossing of the Atlantic in the summer of 1915, he had spent no other time on one of His Majesty's ships. Yet, even though he appears not to have been on *active service* (in a theatre of war) during the years 1914-1915, he was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star.

And this lack of *active service* was apparently not now about to change. HMS *Pembroke** was the Royal Navy establishment at Chatham on the River Medway, itself a tributary of the better-known River Thames, 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 training establishments, mostly not far-removed from Chatham, which were numbered according to the purpose of the training – or otherwise - involved.

Pembroke I was the training station and holding-barracks for regular seamen and it was, as seen above, *Pembroke I* to which Seaman Burrage was now to be attached.



**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.*

Thus these elderly and obsolescent vessels that plied the waters adjacent to the many naval land establishments – and known as stone frigates – were in theory the home ships of the tens, hundreds, thousands of men who laboured ashore.

(Preceding page: *Some of the impressive buildings of the large Royal Navy complex which was a part of 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*)

It was to be more than twenty-three weeks* after his transfer to *Pembroke I* that Seaman Burrage to be transferred to still a further Royal Navy land-based establishment, *President III*.

**There is just a suggestion that he may have been granted a period of furlough to home during the late summer and early autumn of 1916. A John Burrage is found – 'On His Majesty's Service' in a detachment of one-hundred thirty-seven service personnel - on the passenger list of the SS Northland which arrived in the Port of Québec on September 6, 1916, having sailed from Liverpool. This was often the route taken by returning Newfoundlanders. However, no further information appears to be available except that the John Burrage in question was reportedly born in England.*

The Royal Navy establishment to which Seaman Burrage was attached on December 6, 1916, had initially been in London where the original – floating – *President* had been opened to serve as a drill-ship for recruits of the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve. *President III*, one of several Divisions to emerge as the *Great War* progressed, was to deal primarily with finances and accountancy, its offices at times located outside the capital city.

At this point there is the word '*Demobilized*' found on his service record which, in some cases, appears to imply a period of furlough at home, but the author has thus far been unable to find any further evidence of any such event in Seaman Burrage's naval career apart from that cited in an above paragraph. The documents suggest that he was '*Demobilized*' on February 1 while at *President III*, to be '*Remobilized*' some months later, on October 30-31 of the same year, 1917, while still serving there, but what his tasks and duties may have entailed during that lengthy period does not appear to have been included in his scant service records.

Towards the end of Seaman Burrage's time on the books at *President III* he was reportedly attached to a small tramp steamer of some four-thousand plus tons, the *SS Hyndford*. There is very little information to be found about her and perhaps even less about Seaman Burrage while he was on board, likely serving as a gunner.

Early in the *Great War* the ship had been employed in carrying supplies to the *Gallipoli Peninsula* for the Anzac troops fighting there. Following the abandonment of that campaign, she was engaged to carry wheat to Great Britain from Argentina during which time she was torpedoed by a U-boat, an attack which she obviously survived.

Following repairs to the vessel, and for much of the remainder of the conflict, *Hyndford* was to shuttle supplies between Great Britain and France and was also to deliver materials to the northern Russian port of Archangel before Russia retired from the *War* in March of 1918 – although it was a bit more complicated than this single sentence implies.

It may be surmised that some of *Hyndford*'s cross-Channel cargoes originated in Ireland, perhaps having been loaded in the harbour of Queenstown on Ireland's south coast – although this, it must be emphasized, is speculation on the part of the author. The only

recorded information that is to be found is from Seaman Burrage's Service Records which report that he...*died of pneumonia*...in the Royal Naval Hospital of *Haulbowline*, established in Cork Harbour.

(Right: *The once-Royal Naval Hospital and Royal Navy Dockyard of Haulbowline on this island in Cork Harbour adjacent to Queenstown (today Cobh) was a British Army then Royal Navy establishment for some three-hundred years before having been transferred to the new Irish Free State government in 1923. It has been used by the Irish Navy as its headquarters ever since.* – The photograph is from the Wikipedia web-site.)



The son of William Burrage (also found as *Burridge*), fisherman, and of Emily Burrage (née *Matthews**), he was also brother to Sarah; an un-named infant (born 1886-87); Eunice; a twin, Joseph-Richard and Peter; and to William-James.

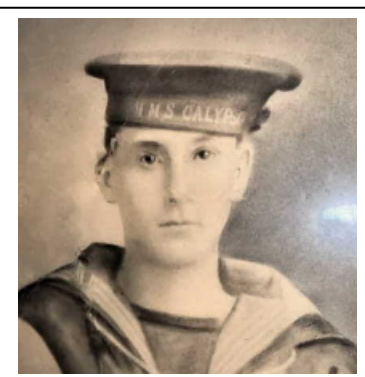
**The couple had been married in the community of New Perlican, Trinity Bay, on November 27 of 1882.*

Seaman John Burrage was recorded as having...*died of illness*...in hospital (see further above) on November 19, 1918, eight days after the termination of hostilities, at the *reported* age of twenty-three years: date of birth at New Perlican, Newfoundland, November 20, 1896 (from his enlistment papers) but September 27 of 1896 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).



(Right adjacent: *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 likeness of Seaman Burrage during the time of his service in St. John's on HMS 'Calypso' is from the Ancestry.ca web-site to which it was donated by Winsor Gough.*)



Seaman Burrage 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 John Burrage 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.