



Seaman John Thomas Adams, Number 1516x, is buried in Scartho Road Cemetery in Grimsby, England: Grave reference 43. C. 12..

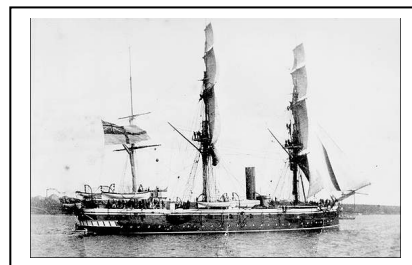
Having decided to *answer the call* of the naval authorities for volunteers, he thereupon travelled from the Placentia Bay community of North Harbour to St. John's*, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on December 29 of 1914, John Thomas Adams reported...*to duty*...on the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that December 29 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. John Thomas Adams also likely 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.*)

(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.

(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)



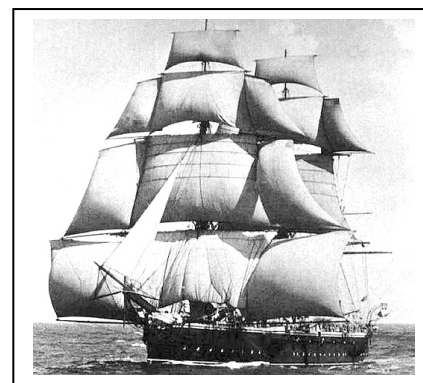
Expenses were apparently defrayed for the most part by the British (Imperial) Government and an attempt was made to ensure the number of recruits would be kept constantly at a maximum. This practice and policy was then to be continued up until the onset of hostilities some twelve years later.

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.



(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)

(continued)

Twenty-eight days* after having first reported to *Calypso* in St. John's, on January 26 he was apparently promoted from the rank of Seaman Recruit; it would then *appear* that a further week hence, on February 4 of that 1915, Seaman Adams was to depart from St. John's to cross the Atlantic – this suggested by the dates documented in his sparse service file.

**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'.*

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: 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 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.

(continued)

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.

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.

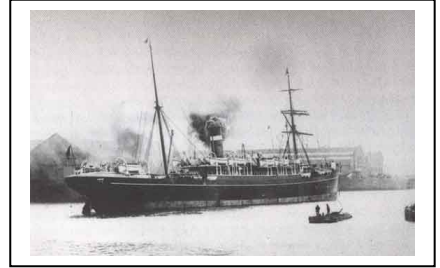
The entire staff of my ship join with me in thanking the men of the Newfoundland Reserve whose conduct throughout was most exemplary and helpful in every way.

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

(continued)

(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 of previous 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 Adams, the destination was to be HMS *Vivid I* at Plymouth-Devonport on the English south coast.

Vivid I was a base and barracks for regular seamen and it was therefore *Vivid I* to which Seaman Adams was to be attached.

**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 Adams 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 Adams were to be stationed.

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



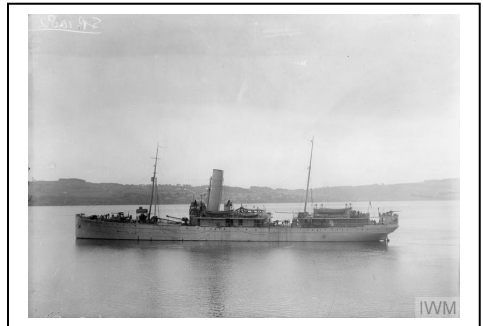
(continued)

Seaman Adams was to serve six weeks and day at *Vivid I* before, on April 19, he was seconded to another Division, *Trawler Reserve*, and was thereupon to spend eleven further weeks – perhaps at *Vivid III* - in that Section as a deck-hand, although there is no record of him setting foot on the deck of any ship during this time.

The summons to service on board one of His Majesty's ships having eventually arrived eleven weeks later again, Seaman Adams was to be officially attached on July 6-7 to a squadron supply vessel, HMS *Stephen Furness*. The unidentified squadron in question was likely to have comprised either elderly warships (often cruisers) or armed merchant cruisers whose task was to blockade Germany by stopping and inspecting the cargoes of any and all commercial vessels. Any found to be suspect were left with an armed guard on board and with orders to proceed to a British-controlled port.

HMS *Stephen Furness* was based in the Cromarty Firth on Scotland's east coast, and responsible from there as far north as Peterhead. She had taken over some of her duties from another parent ship, the yacht HMS *Columbine* stationed further south at Rosyth on the Firth of Forth, and was in turn to be succeeded at Cromarty by another vessel, *Thalia*, as seen further below.

(Right: The photograph of the 'Stephen Furness' is from the naval-history.net.uk web-site. Requisitioned in 1914 she was to serve as a squadron supply ship for some fifteen months. In early 1916 she was converted into an armed boarding steamer and armed with larger-calibre weapons, two 4.7-inch naval guns. On December 13, 1917, while en route to Liverpool from the Shetland Islands she was torpedoed and sunk by the U-boat 64. Going down abruptly before the life-boats could be launched, she carried ninety-nine persons with her.)



Seaman Adams served on or with *Stephen Furness* until March 30 of 1916. The last weeks of this period may well have been on paper only as the ship had been re-converted and re-armed by March 7 to act as an armed boarding steamer and by the end of March may well have been on her first patrol in the waters north of the Shetland and Orkney Islands as far as Russia.

Seaman Adams was now taken in charge by another ship, the aforesaid *Thalia*. She, a small, requisitioned and hired yacht of some eighty-four tons, was to take over the duties at Cromarty relinquished by the *Stephen Furness* upon her transformation into an armed boarding steamer. Unfortunately, as had been the case when he served on *Stephen Furness*, there appears nothing among the records that documents exactly what his duties may have been, or even if they were to be on board the ship in question or perhaps at one of the associated shore-based facilities.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *The venerable Juno-Class wooden screw-corvette had been constructed as early as 1869. She was still in service two years after the cessation of hostilities. – The image is from the greatwarforum.org web-site to which it was contributed by Darkie Booth whose grand-father, John Milne, had also served on both of the afore-mentioned vessels.*)

Following three months of service with HMS *Thalia*, Seaman Adams returned to HMS *Vivid*, to be precise, to *Vivid III*, the Trawler Section.

There is now a an eight and a-half month period in Seaman Adams' war-time service which is far from clear. His papers record two names, seemingly of the same vessel: *Peten* and *Eaglet*. The author has found no *Peten* in the Royal Navy's list of ships but perhaps an *Eaglet* – apart from the one which came into being in Liverpool in 1918: too late.

Our *Eaglet* began her career as *Eagle* but was to be re-named in February of 1915. She was a requisitioned trawler of one-hundred seventy tons which had been built in 1899 and which had then fished out of the east-coast port of Hull. Hired by the Admiralty after the onset of the conflict, she was converted and armed with a single six-pounder gun in order to undertake war-time duties as a mine-sweeper.



(Right above: *A photograph of HM Trawler 'Eaglet' not being available, this is a requisitioned trawler of the Great War, the John Edmund, larger than 'Eaglet' and with a larger-calibre weapon which may here discerned mounted on the ship's foredeck. – photograph from the naval-history.net web-site)*

It has not proved possible to ascertain where exactly HM Trawler *Eaglet* was stationed during the *Great War*. However, *if* this was to be Seaman Adams' ship, later circumstances suggest that both she and he were posted to the east coast of England, perhaps to the port of Grimsby.

Nothing of exception militarily appears to have been experienced by either *Eaglet* or by Seaman Adams during the period of July 31, 1916, until April 16 of the following year, 1917, when he was to be transferred – but perhaps only on paper – to another Royal Naval Command, this one southward, in the Counties of Suffolk and Essex.

However, during that same period serving with *Eaglet*, he had met a young lady, a Miss Rosetta Waters of Number 13, East Gate Terrace, Holme Street, Great Grimsby. They were to marry in Grimsby on the first day of May of that 1917.

HMS *Ganges*, the original base in the small village of Shotley, Suffolk, but with much of its activity during the war years centred in the Essex coastal town and harbour of not-distant Harwich, was now to be Seaman Adams' place of service. It would also appear from his sparse Service Records, that HM Trawler *Eaglet* was also to now be stationed there as part of the flotilla of small ships employed as patrol and escort vessels, as inspection and maintenance craft for nets and other defensive systems, and as mine-sweepers*.

**There were other types of war-ships stationed there as well: cruisers and destroyers, collectively known as the 'Harwich Force' which were also used to carry the war to the enemy not only on the water but also on the occupied coast of Belgium on the other side of the North Sea. The harbour was also used as a submarine base which hunted enemy shipping – as did their German counterparts, with torpedoes and with mines, while just across the River Stour at Felixtowe was a Royal Naval Air Station.*

It was to *Ganges I*, the seamen's facilities and barracks, that Seaman Adams was posted – although it appears that his wife remained at her family home in Grimsby. But once again, his papers do not provide an account of what were to be the tasks and duties of a Royal Navy Seaman from Newfoundland at HMS *Ganges* from April 17 of 1917 until the final day of November of 1918, some nineteen months later...by which time, of course, the hostilities had ceased.

And also by which time, the pandemic of the disease to be known as the *Spanish 'Flu'* was rampant. Whether or not Seaman Adams was to fall victim to it is not documented, but he was to exhibit some of the symptoms including bronchitis and pneumonia, and HMS *Ganges* recorded outbreaks of both 'flu and diphtheria at this time.

The son of Joseph Adams, fisherman - his mother is not identified among his documents – he was resident of North Harbour, Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, at the time of his enlistment. He was also husband to Rosetta as seen above, and father of Mary Jane, born in Grimsby on April 23 of 1919.

(Right: A Memorial Scroll, a copy of which was distributed to the families of those who had sacrificed their life while in the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve)



Seaman John Thomas Adams was to die on November 30 of 1918 (not December 4 as the Newfoundland Death Register cites) of illness – broncho-pneumonia - at the *reported* age of thirty years at Shotley in the county of Suffolk, England, and was later buried in Grimsby, not at Shotley as recorded elsewhere: date of birth at Tack's Beach, Newfoundland, October 27, 1888 (from Royal Navy Records and his own enlistment papers).

Seaman Adams 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 and the Imperial War Museum.

Seaman John Thomas Adams 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.