

Seaman William Thomas Babstock, Number 477x, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on a bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

Having decided to volunteer for the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland), William Thomas Babstock had initially presented himself for enlistment, and likely a medical assessment on February 6 of 1908, whereupon he was to undergo a first twenty-eight days of training, until the fifth day of the month following.

As with majority of pre-War volunteers, he had joined-up for five years, a period during which he was contracted to undergo five annual training sessions of twenty-eight days duration. These were duly undertaken by him, the last being during the months of January and February of 1914.

Then of course, in 1914, the events of that summer of 1914 were to unfold and William Thomas Babstock would be called upon to fulfil his obligations..

Summoned from home *to service* during the late autumn of the same year, William Thomas Babstock travelled from his family residence in the Eastport Peninsula, Bonavista Bay community of Happy Adventure to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on the sixth day of December of 1914 – some four months following the British *Declaration of War* – he was once again to report...*to duty*...to the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

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On that above-mentioned December 6, William Thomas Babstock was signed on for a single year's wartime service* and it was likely to have been at this time – if he had not already done so - that he also attested, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor.

(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 in the uniform of an Admiral of the Fleet is from the Royal Collection Trust web-site, 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.

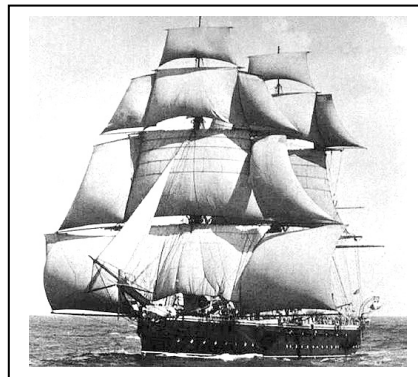
Just fewer than four-hundred men were sought to enroll as seamen – apparently automatically at the rank of Able Seaman - and to present themselves annually in St. John's for five years in order to train for a period of twenty-eight days per annum. Allowed to report at a time of their own choosing, it is perhaps not surprising that these volunteers – mostly fishermen – were to opt to train during the winter months when fishing work was at a minimum.

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.

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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, 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.



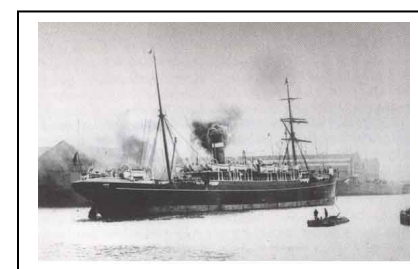
(Right: H.M.S. 'Calypso' in full sail. She was to be re-named 'Briton' in 1916 when a new 'Calypso', a modern cruiser, was launched by the Royal Navy. – photograph by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)

Twenty-three days* after having first reported to Calypso in St. John's, on December 17 Seaman Recruit Price was one of a draft of one-hundred fifty-three Naval volunteers to board the steamship Mongolian in St. John's Harbour for passage across the Atlantic to the United Kingdom. The ship sailed for the Scottish port-city of Glasgow at four o'clock on that same afternoon.



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

(Right: Built in 1891 for use by the 'Allan Line' for the transport of emigrants from Europe to North America, 'Mongolian' was a slow vessel with a speed of just twelve knots and was, by 1914, becoming obsolescent. She was nevertheless to be bought in 1914 for use by the Admiralty and remained in service until July 21 of 1918 when she was torpedoed and sunk by U-boat 70 with a loss of thirty-five lives. – photograph from the British Home Child Group International web-site)



***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'.**

As seen above, Glasgow was to be the destination of Seaman Babstock's draft. Upon disembarkation the Naval Reserve personnel would thereupon have been either posted

directly to a ship or ordered to undergo further training – or to await further orders at one of various Royal Navy establishments, these for the most part in southern England.

In the case of Seaman Babstock, the destination was to be HMS *Victory I*, the Royal Navy training centre and barracks at the south-coast naval port-city of Portsmouth at almost the other end of the country.

HMS ‘Victory’, like most of the so-called stone-frigates (naval establishments on shore), was three entities: it had been a training establishment originally, and also a holding-barracks for seamen, not only those in training but otherwise awaiting a posting to one of His Majesty’s ships. In addition , ‘Victory’ was also a 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.*

As seen above, Seaman Babstock was posted to *Victory I*, one of the several Divisions of HMS *Victory*, each specializing in some way from the others – *Victory II*, for example, trained stokers and other engine-room personnel. *Victory I* was dedicated to the training of seamen or, if they were already trained as was the case of Seaman Babstock, it was, as also seen above, a holding-barracks where he was now to stay for a period of thirty-one weeks, until August 8 of 1915.

On that date Seaman Babstock was transferred westward along the coast to Portland Harbour in the county of Dorset a construction which was well placed to defend the English Channel and the approaches to it. At the time of its completion in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, it was the largest man-made harbour in the world; it remains one of the largest to this day and it was to there, Portland – by then become an *Auxiliary Patrol Depot* - that Seaman Babstock was ordered in that summer of 1915.

The *Auxiliary Patrol* was a system created just prior to the Great War to provide the coasts of the United Kingdom and Ireland with protection from German submarines which were a

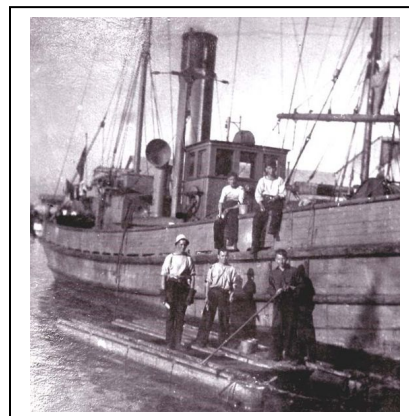
threat not only because of the torpedoes that they carried but with the mines that they were to lay. The Royal Navy, having insufficient suitable war-ships to carry out these duties, were thus supplemented by trawlers and other smaller craft requisitioned from civilian use – and manned mostly by their peace-time crews who had been seconded into the Royal Naval Reserve.

These small ships were re-fitted and armed for war-time service and their manpower supplemented where deemed necessary by other Royal Navy and Royal Naval Reserve personnel. Thus Seaman Babstock was to find himself serving on three of His Majesty's Trawlers in succession, vessels which were based at Portland Harbour and Dockyard.

Thus having served for fifty-two days at Portland, but on the books of HMS *Victory VII*, Seaman Babstock became the responsibility of HMS *Research* on October 1, 1915; the transfer was likely to have been only on paper since *HMS Research*, an elderly paddle-steamer whose career since her launch in 1888 had been as a survey-vessel, had in that 1915 been sent to Portland Harbour to serve as the *Auxiliary Patrol Base's* depot ship and to lend her name to the Base itself.

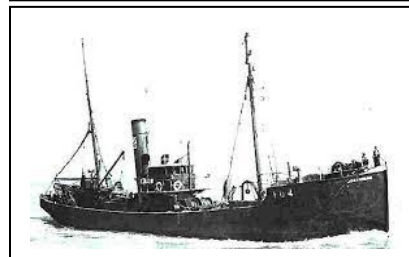
His Service Record suggests that Seaman Babstock was not to spend much – if any – time on board HMS *Research* herself, or at any of the land-based facilities attached to her as, on that first day of October it appears that he was to set foot on the deck of His Majesty's Trawler *Annie Melling*. Even for a trawler she was of a smaller build, just some two-hundred twenty tons.

She had been constructed in 1906 and had worked out of the northern fishing-port of Preston. Requisitioned and hired not long after the onset of the *Great War*, she had been re-fitted, equipped with a single six-pounder quick-firing gun, and had entered into war-time service in April of 1915 as a mine-sweeper. She was to undertake her duties for the next three years and eight months before being retired from the *Auxiliary Patrol* in December, 1918, one month after the cessation of hostilities.



(Right adjacent: *The photograph showing crew-members re-fitting their unidentified trawler for mine-sweeping duties is from the 'Pinterest' web-site to which it was donated by Dr. David Beatty and Leslie Goodwin.*)

During that afore-mentioned period, Seaman Babstock was to be a member of her crew, from October 1, 1915, until July 31 of 1916.



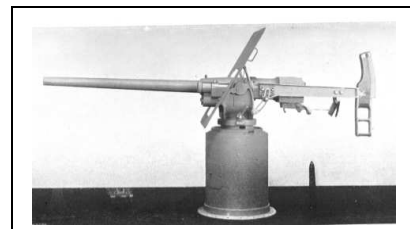
(Right above: *A vessel not un-similar to 'Annie Melling', the two-hundred fifty ton trawler 'Dagon' is seen here in peacetime: the photograph shown is from the maritimearchaeologytrust web-site via Google.*)

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The second trawler to which Seaman Babstock was to be attached was HMT *Salvini*, a vessel comparable to *Annie Melling*, armed in the same manner and also used as a mine-sweeper. She too was to survive the *Great War*, having served from June of 1916 into the year 1919, and would see service in the same role twenty years afterwards when she was requisitioned for employment as such in the *Second World War*.



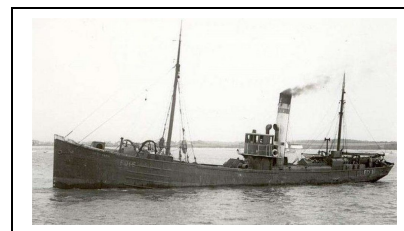
Seaman Babstock was to be a one of her complement for eight months from August 1, 1916, immediately after his service on *Annie Melling*, until the last day of March of the year following, 1917.



(Right above: *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*)

(Right above: *A Quick-Firing Hotchkiss six-pounder gun such as would had been mounted on the fore-deck of each of the ships on which Seaman Babstock served. – from Wikipedia*)

On that last afore-mentioned date, Seaman Babstock was transferred to a further ship, the requisitioned trawler *Arfon*, again a ship similar to the two which had preceded, and again to be used as a mine-sweeper. The first of the three to be put into service, in 1914, by the British Admiralty, she was to be the only one to become a casualty of the *Great War*.



(Right above: *This is not an image of HMT 'Arfon' but a photograph of the trawler 'City of York', described as very similar to Seaman Babstock's last ship. – from the Swanage Boat Charters Ltd. archive as provided to the BBC*)

The German U-Boat *UC-61* was a minelaying submarine, not a vessel of the high seas sent to destroy enemy shipping with its gun and its torpedoes. Her mission was to operate in the heavily-mined waters of the English Channel, to plant new fields but also to replace any mines that the enemy – the British and French – had succeeded in destroying since the U-Boat's last visit.

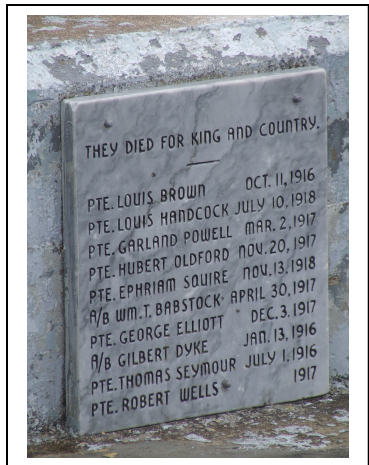
On this occasion her mines had been un-leashed in the waters of the English Channel off St. Alban's Head, to the east of Portland Harbour on England's south coast. On April 30, 1917, HMT *Arfon* struck one or came close enough to incite it to explode, an explosion which ripped the forward part off the ship which then sank in two minutes*. Ten of her crew of thirteen were lost, the three survivors having been blown overboard by the force of the detonation.

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**Her wreck was not discovered until 2014, a second source has 1916, ninety-seven years after her loss, at a site away from the supposed location of her sinking and is today protected, access to the wreck by divers being restricted.*

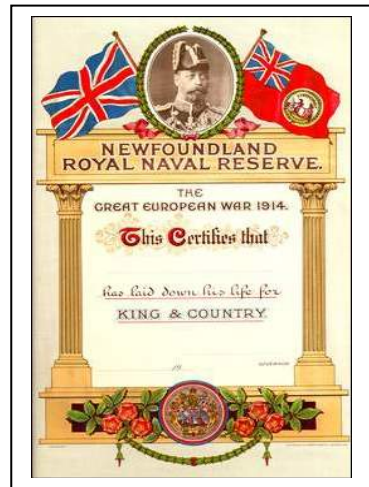
The son of Lemuel Babstock, fisherman, and of Eliza Babstock (née Napper*), the family of Happy Adventure, Bonavista Bay, he was also older brother to Elizabeth-Jane, Minnie, Martha-Ann and to Bertha.

(Right: Among the many names found on the Eastport Peninsula War Memorial – apparently transferred to where it is today from its original site on Flat Island - is honoured the sacrifice of Able Seaman William T. Babstock – photograph from 2013)



**The couple was married in the community of Musgravetown on November 17, 1884.*

Seaman William Thomas Babstock died on April 30 of 1917 – other sources document other dates - at the reported age of thirty-two years: date of birth in the Bonavista Bay community of Happy Adventure, Newfoundland, January 18 of 1885 (from Royal Navy Records), but January 14 of the same year (from the Parish of Salvage Birth Records).



(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)

Seaman Babstock 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 Thomas Babstock was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



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.