

BROWN, E.



Seaman Edmond (also found as *Edmund*) William Brown, Number 815x, 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), Edmond Brown had initially presented himself for enlistment, and likely a medical assessment, on October 7 of 1904, whereupon he was to undergo a first twenty-eight days of training until the early days of the month following.



Edmond Brown was apparently to be the four-hundred second volunteer to enlist in the Reserve.

As with the majority of pre-War volunteers, Edmond Brown had joined-up for five years, a period during which he was contracted to undergo five annual trainings of twenty-eight days. This commitment he had apparently fulfilled before having decided to enroll for a second time. Sources appear to differ about the dates of this happening: one suggests as early as November of 1907 which would imply that he had trained on multiple occasions – as did several of his fellow Reservists - during some of those intervening years; a further source, also reliable, suggests that his second term was not to commence until 1909, his final training to take place during November and December of the year 1912. Neither source records any further such periods before he was called to war-time service.

Then of course, in that 1914, the events of the summer were to intervene and Edmond Brown would be called upon to fulfil his obligations to the Crown.

Summoned by *Royal Proclamation* from home to service soon after the onset of hostilities, Edmond Brown travelled, apparently from his family residence in Fogo, to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland. There, on August 9 of 1914 – five days 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).

On that above-mentioned August 9, Edmond Brown was signed on for a 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, George V.

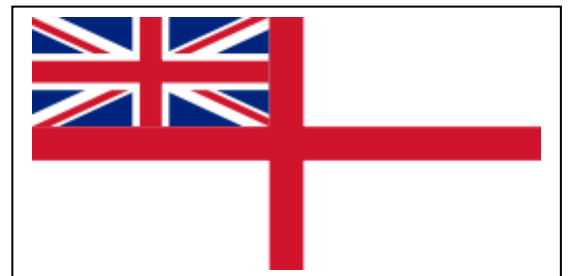


**At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist. Later recruits – as of or about May of 1916 - signed on for the 'Duration' at the time of their original enlistment.*

***Had he done so in 1904, 1907 or 1909, the oath would have been to the preceding monarch, King Edward VII.*

(Right above: 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.)

(Right: *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.

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.



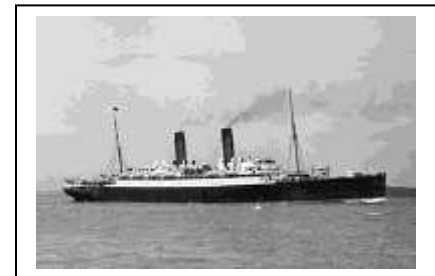
(Right above: H.M.S. 'Calypso' in full sail. She was to be re-named 'Briton' in 1916 when a new 'Calypso', a modern cruiser, was launched by the Royal Navy. – photograph by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)

Following some three months of duties – no further training has been recorded – Seaman Brown, one of a draft of three-hundred five Naval Reservists, embarked on November 5-6 onto the Cunard ocean-liner *Franconia* on her trans-Atlantic way, serving the commercial route from New York to Liverpool.



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

Once having arrived in the port-city of Liverpool on November 11, it appears that several of the men were posted directly to a ship. Others were ordered to undergo further training at various Royal Navy establishments and thus, likely having journeyed by train, reported to these bases only hours later.



Seaman Brown was among the latter number.

(Right above: A relatively new vessel, 'Franconia' had been launched on July 23 of 1910. Remaining un-requisitioned as a troop transport until early 1915, it was to be well over a year later that on 4 October, 1916, while heading for Salonika, she was torpedoed and sunk by a German submarine to the east of Malta She was not carrying any troops at the time, but out of her 314 crew members, 12 died. – photograph from Wikipedia)

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

On an unspecified mid-November day, Seaman Brown was...*taken on strength*...at HMS *Excellent*, the Royal Navy gunnery school by then located on *Whale Island* at the entrance to the harbour at Portsmouth. He was to train there until December 17 when he was ordered to join his ship, HMS *Bayano*, likely destined to serve one of the guns with which by that time the ship had been fitted.



Seaman Brown was not the only one of the Newfoundland Reservists who had travelled overseas to be dispatched to *Excellent*. Of these soon-to-be *seaman-gunners*, a goodly number would subsequently be attached to three of His Majesty's Armed Merchant Cruisers which were soon to be lost with a heavy loss of life, many of them from the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland).

(Right below: *Drill on a naval gun on 'Whale Island' during the period of the Great War – from Wikipedia*)

Note: 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*'.



The three aforesaid ships were HMS *Viknor*, HMS *Clan Mc Naughton* and HMS *Bayano*. They were lost – in the above order – in the first three months of 1915, and it was to the third of the above-named vessels, *Bayano*, that Seaman Brown was attached. He had travelled north to Scotland and back to Glasgow where he had disembarked from *Carthaginian* only weeks before, since Glasgow was where the soon-to-be HMS *Bayano* was being re-fitted and where she would subsequently be stationed.

Bayano was a new ship, a smallish six-thousand ton passenger and cargo (particularly, apparently, bananas) vessel, built in 1913, and which was to be requisitioned during the early period of the *Great War* for service as an Armed Merchant Cruiser. To this end *Bayano* was armed with two six-inch guns – six-inches is the calibre – before being ordered into service on November 21 of 1914.

Bayano was to be attached to the 10th Cruiser Squadron, also known as the *Northern Patrol*, a force based at *Scapa Flow* – although often sailing into and out of Liverpool - and originally comprised of out-of-date warships which, by that January of 1915, had been replaced by requisitioned ocean-going passenger–cargo ships fitted with guns, some as elderly as a number of the venerable ships on which they were mounted.

(continued)

(Right below: A six-inch gun such as those mounted on 'Bayano', although this one has been fitted for coastal defence – photograph from 2010(?) and taken at the Royal Artillery Museum at Woolwich)

The ships of the 10th Cruiser Squadron were not spoiling – and certainly not prepared - for a fight. Their job was to form a part of the naval blockade designed to prevent ships carrying goods to Germany from reaching their destination; to accomplish this these vessels had to patrol the area of stormy waters encompassed by northern Scotland, the Shetlands, Iceland and Ireland, a thankless job at the best of times: during the tempestuous winter months, even worse.



Two of the first losses during the War among those Armed Merchant Cruisers were to be vessels of the 10th Cruiser Squadron: as seen further above, HMS *Viknor* was lost on January 13, 1915, taking with her the entire crew of three-hundred two, including twenty-five Reservists; only three weeks later HMS *Clan McNaughton* sank and a like number of crewmen died, of which twenty-two Newfoundlanders.



Bayano was to be the next.

(Right above: HMS 'Bayano' is here seen clad in her war-time camouflage dress and with one of those six-inch guns prominent in a forward position. The caption also claims the year to be a rather doubtful 1913 – it cites her as 'coming into service' which, as seen above, was not until 1914. – photograph from Wikipedia)

The following is an account of the sinking of HMS *Bayano* and is adapted from a report found on the *Scottish Shipwrecks* web-site:

On 25th February, 1915 the submarine U-27 left Emden in the early morning. It was to be a sortie that would culminate in an attack on HMS 'Bayano' in the Firth of Clyde two weeks later. The submarine passed north around Orkney on February 28, turned south west into the North Atlantic, then west of the Outer Hebrides to arrive in its patrol area in the North Channel on March 3. For the next week the U-boat roamed the area with no success until the morning of March 11 in the Firth of Clyde.*

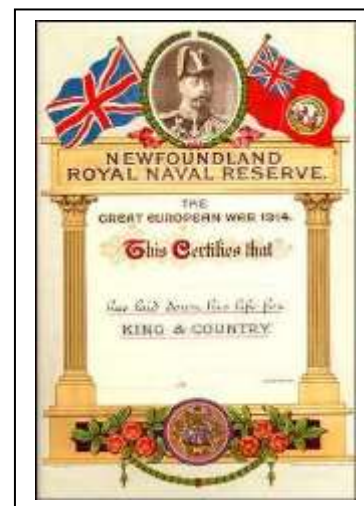
At that moment 'Bayano' was returning to sea to her patrol duties under the command of Captain Carr with a crew of nearly two hundred and fifty. At 4:50am she was a few miles north of Corsewall Point, Galloway. The night was clear but overcast and dark and the sea calm. Two thirds of the crew were asleep, the third watch being in charge of the vessel steaming through the night.

The U-boat Captain later stated that through the periscope he saw a large commercial steamship steaming out of the Firth with lights dimmed. He was some 300 metres from the ship and fired a single torpedo from his bow tube. The torpedo struck 'Bayano' on the forward quarter and exploded.

Aboard 'Bayano' the explosion flung most of those sleeping from their hammocks, killing many instantly in and around the engine room where the torpedo struck. This first explosion was followed by further detonations in the ship's magazine. The vessel filled with smoke and steam, and water rushed in through holes in her hull. The survivors later told many stories of heroism aboard at that time: wireless operators remaining at their posts broadcasting SOS messages; the sailor handing out lifejackets to his colleagues as the sea rose around him; and the captain going down with his ship having organised the evacuation of as many as possible.

Within minutes of the initial explosion 'Bayano' sank by the bow, her stern rising into the air before vanishing in a steamy, smoky cloud. A final explosion heralded her disappearance. The suction caused by the ship sinking dragged down many who had jumped into the sea.

(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)



The first vessel to arrive on the scene was the SS 'Castlereagh' of Belfast, its captain later to describe the scene confronting him as a 'sea of corpses in lifejackets'. He stopped his engines but, fearing the return of the same U-boat, then ordered full steam and set off to safely reach port.

Hours later the SS 'Balmaino' also arrived at the scene of the sinking. Its captain, attracted by survivors waving from two of the ship's life-rafts and an upturned lifeboat, stopped to pick up twenty-four survivors.

(Right: The photograph of the SS 'Balmaino' is from The Scottish Shipwrecks web-site.)



'Bayano' was lost with over two hundred of her crew, including eleven Newfoundland sailors. A second source cites twenty-six survivors, among them Leading Seaman Stephen Keates (458x) of Starr's Cove, Twillingate, rescued by the above-mentioned SS 'Balmaino'.

***On August 19 of that same year, the U-27 was sunk and its crew killed by a British Q-ship in circumstances that in some quarters was considered to be a war-crime. The entire incident was apparently covered up by the British Admiralty.**

The son of William Richard Brown, fisherman, and of Mary Ann Brown (née Anstey*, deceased of tuberculosis on Cottel's Island on December 3, 1891) of Fogo, he was also younger brother to Susan-Maria and to Levi-Andrew (born 1882, father un-named).

***The couple had married in Moreton's Harbour on October 27 of 1884. There is a suggestion that William Brown was to later re-marry.**

Seaman-Gunner Edmond Brown died on March 11 of 1915, at the *reported* age of twenty-nine years: date of birth at Fogo on Fogo Island, Newfoundland, June 19, 1886 (from Royal Navy records), but found as June 8, 1886, in the Newfoundland Birth Register as is the spelling of *Edmund*.

Seaman Brown 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-Gunner Edmond Brown 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 20, 2023.