

Leading Seaman Jacob Bussey, Number 1742x, is buried in England, in the town of Middlesborough's Linthorpe Cemetery: Grace reference C.C.8975.

Having relinquished his occupation, likely that of a fisherman, Jacob Bussey answered the call of the naval authorities for volunteers and travelled from Goulds, Brigus, in the District of Port de Grave, to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on April 4 of 1915, he reported...to duty...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS Calypso, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that early-April day 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 then underwent a satisfactory medical assessment on the morrow. He also likely attested at this time, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V.

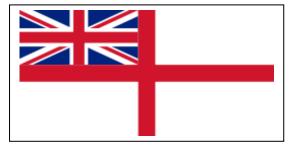
(Right: George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India: as a boy and young man he had served in the Royal Navy from 1877 until 1891 and always retained a fondness for the Senior 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 sisterships 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.

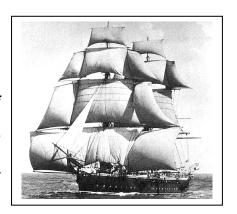
Of course, the purpose of having a reserve force at any time is to provide a trained force ready at any time to serve at a time of need or crisis. Thus in August of 1914, upon the Declaration of War by the government in London, hundreds of those men of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) were to make 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, 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 above: HMS '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 in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)

Seaman Bussey's scant personal file – showing him to no longer be a Recruit - suggests him leaving for service overseas on or about May 29, three weeks and a day following his

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

(Right: 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 three 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.



(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)

The story follows 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.



(Right above: Delgado Point on Flores Island, close to where the convoy anchored, and then past which it sailed on June 26, 1915 – photograph 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.)

(continued)

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 wait - at one of various Royal Navy establishments – these for the most part operating around the coast of England.

In the case of Seaman Bussey, not immediately attached to a vessel, *Victory I* (see below) was the posting to which he was directed and where he was to remain for only a week - although seven weeks less a day on the nominal roll since discharged from HMS *Briton* - until July 17 of that same year – although what his occupations were to be during this time – apart from awaiting a posting - is unclear.

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 above: 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 and obsolescent vessel was used for this purely bureaucratic purpose.

(continued)

Having passed some seven weeks less a day at *Victory I*, Seaman Bussey was ordered dispatched to service at the Royal Navy Gunnery School on the nearby Whale Island: HMS *Excellent**, from where on a fine day Portsmouth Harbour may be seen.

*HMS 'Excellent' was the name – and also today 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'.



(Right adjacent: 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.

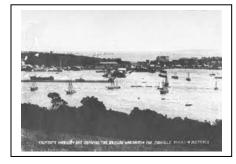


(Right: The Royal Navy Memorial stands on the coast at Portsmouth from where may be seen 'Whale Island' – photograph from 1917)

Which is why Seaman Bussey would, after *Victory I*, have worn an HMS *Excellent* capband until November 3-4 (or November 23-24, both are recorded). Twenty weeks less three days afterwards (or twenty-three weeks less two days), he was to be transferred to a further Royal Navy land-based establishment, *President III*.'

This Royal Navy establishment 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.

However, while it is unlikely that Seaman Bussey was to become involved with accounting, it would appear that neither was he to become involved with shipping until one-hundred one days later when he was attached, at least on paper, to the Royal Navy base at Falmouth, otherwise known as HMS *Dreel Castle*.



(Right: A grainy view of the deep-water harbour at Falmouth in the English county of Cornwall in the Great War. – from the FHA A3 Map WW1 v5 Web web-site)

However, while *Dreel Castle* was a real ship, since she was the parent ship of the base, other facilities on shore were also part of *Dreel Castle's* responsibilities and were also

named likewise and it has not been recorded whether or not Seaman Bussey's duties were on land or afloat. And in fact, the answer to that question may have been...elsewhere.

During some of that period at Falmouth – or perhaps during all of it – he was attached to a requisitioned patrol tug-boat: *Blackcock*, an innocuous little vessel, but one that had just returned from an epic journey to the coast of East Africa.

The German light cruiser *Konigsberg* had been operating from there against British shipping and it was decided that the Royal Navy monitors* HMS *Severn* and *Mersey* would be sent to the East Coast of the African Continent – some of it a German colony at the time - to deal with her. However, due to their instability at sea the monitors needed to be towed there and thus *Blackcock* was sent with five other tugs to undertake the journey. The *Konigsberg* was eventually dealt with although the tugs apparently played only a very peripheral role in the operation and these smaller craft subsequently returned to England in the autumn of 1915.

*Smaller ships but armed with one or two larger-calibre guns, they were able to operate in shallower waters. In fact, the above-named vessels and a sister-ship had been bought by the Brazilian Navy for use in the rivers of that country.



(Right: The photograph of HMS 'Severn' is from the Wikipedia web-site.)

After her exploits to and through the Mediterranean, the Suez canal, the East African Coast and the *Rufiji River* delta, there appears to be little documented of *Blackcock*'s later career apart from the fact that Seaman Bussey was to serve on her during the first half of the year 1916 until maybe as late as July 17-18, this the date on which he is recorded as having returned to HMS *Excellent* for further gunnery training.

At this time he may well have become accustomed to the operation on a heavier calibre weapon than he would have been responsible for on HM Tug *Blackcock* which had been a relatively small six-pounder quick-firing gun. And also, it was at the very end of this period – in fact on the final day of his service there - that he was to be appointed to the rank of (*Acting*) Leading Seaman.



(Right above: A Quick-Firing Hotchkiss 6 pounder gun such as would had been mounted on the fore-deck of the trawler Blackcock – from Wikipedia)

He was to remain attached to HMS *Excellent* on this second occasion for one-hundred fourteen days when he then was re-posted to *President III*. The date of Leading Seaman Bussey's return to *President III* was November 10, 1916, and he was then to remain on the establishment's nominal roll for some nineteen months.

There is also 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. Leading Seaman Bussey appears to have been reported as 'Demobilized' and then to be 'Remobilized' at some time during that lengthy time while on the nominal roll of President III, but what his other tasks and duties may have entailed during that period do not appear to have been documented in his scant service records (but see some paragraphs further below).

There is to be found twice in the passenger lists of the SS *Kyle* the name of Jacob Bussey, Newfoundland Naval Reservist: the first such-named having returned from *overseas service* to serve on HMS *Briton* from late October to mid-December of 1917, sailed from Port aux Basques to North Sydney of December 17 to North Sydney, there to continue with a naval detachment to Halifax, presumably to take ship from there to return to the United Kingdom – except that Halifax was at that time closed to shipping due to the explosion of only some twelve days before. They quite possibly crossed from St. John, New Brunswick.

This Reservist appears to have been Seaman Jacob Bussey, also of Port de Grave, but Number 1182x.

Leading Seaman Jacob Bussey, Number 1742x and the one whose dossier this is, is documented as still – or again - serving at HMS *President III* – as seen above – on October 30-31, 1917, and to have continued to do so until June 21, 1918, months later, when he was re-assigned to the Royal Navy Gunnery School, HMS *Excellent* at Portsmouth, for a month, then having completed that further service there on July 22.

However, in the meantime, while on the books of *President III* during that long period of almost eight months from October, 1917, until that afore-mentioned June of the following year, 1918, he had also been recorded as...*Demobilized*...and then as...*Remobilized*..., this suggesting that he *too* may have been granted furlough home to Newfoundland for some of that time.

On December 22, 1917, the passenger list of the *Reid Newfoundland Company* steamer *Kyle* records a second Seaman Bussey – initial perhaps J. or S. – disembarking in North Sydney, Cape Breton, at seven-thirty in the morning, one of a small draft of eight Newfoundland Reservists to do so, to continue by train his journey as far as Halifax. There appear to be no further details available but this would seem likely to have been Leading Seaman Jacob Bussey, 1742x.

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The available documents appear not to show what in fact happened next to either the above-mentioned Seaman Bussey, 1182x, or Leading Seaman Bussey, 1742x, as the recent Halifax Explosion had brought about a great deal of at least temporary change.

Some days prior to the scheduled arrival of both these Reservists' anticipated arrival in Halifax there had been an accident in the port which had resulted in a detonation which had left the port, the city's downtown area and the railway system for the most part destroyed.

On December 6 two ships, the Norwegian Imo and the French Mont Blanc collided, as a result of which the Mont Blanc caught fire. She was laden with explosives and the subsequent explosion - reportedly the largest man-made explosion in history up until that time - devastated both the port and the city itself.

More than seventeen-hundred were killed and nine-thousand hurt.

The down-town and waterside areas of the city were devastated and to add to the misery of the now-homeless, a major winter storm was unleashed upon them on the following day.

(Right: A view of an obliterated Halifax with its harbour in the distance, the photograph taken two days after the incident. – from 'Wikipedia')



(Right: The Canadian war-ship HMCS 'Niobe' based in Halifax had sent one of its boats to the aid of 'Mont Blanc' before the ship exploded; when she did, all of the boat's crew were killed, as were some of those on board 'Niobe' itself — with several more hurt. 'Niobe' was damaged in the blast but was able to continue her functions in a diminished manner. Several Newfoundland Reservists had been seconded to and were serving on her at this time. — The photograph of a damaged 'Niobe' is from the Canadian War Museum web-site.)



For a while the port had been immobilized, its infrastructure destroyed and it was only gradually that Halifax was to be capable of functioning as a port – or even as a habitable city - once more. And since Montréal and Québec were at the time closing because of the impending winter ice, it was to be Saint John, New Brunswick, through which much of the trans-Atlantic traffic, material and human, was now to flow.

Whether either Seaman Bussey or Leading Seaman Bussey and their Newfoundland comrades-in-arms were to in fact sail as planned from Halifax appears not to have been recorded and neither apparently is the identity of the vessel on which the draft was eventually to leave Canada for the United Kingdom.

But sail they did, both to disembark in the United Kingdom*.

*Seaman Jacob Bussey, 1182x, was to serve from that time onwards until being repatriated in early 1919, to thereupon serve for seven weeks less two days on HMS 'Briton' when he was demobilized on April 7, 1919. His gravestone records his passing in 1971. (Other sources have confused him with Leading Seaman Jacob Bussey, 1742x, and have mis-reported his death.)

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Where Leading Seaman Bussey was to be posted immediately following the above-reported one-month assignment at HMS *Excellent* in the summer of 1918 is not at all clear – perhaps at Middlesborough as will become apparent further below. He is once again

recorded as attached to *President III* – on July 23 - but this may once more be only official usage as he was surely soon – if not right away - to be posted to a ship, in this case a merchant ship, likely a *defensively armed* vessel with Leading Seaman Bussey to become one of its naval gunners.

(Right below: Seen here is a quick-firing naval twelve-pounder (the weight of the shell) and twelve hundred-weight (1200 lbs. the weight of the barrel and breech) gun, displayed as adapted for use in 1941, but perhaps such as found on the merchantman 'Burutu' in Leading Seaman Bussey's war. – photograph taken at the Royal Artillery Museum 'Firepower', Woolwich, in 2010)

The SS 'Burutu', a ship of almost four thousand tons of the British and African Steam Navigation Company Limited, had sailed from Lagos, the Nigerian Capital, in early April of that 1918 and was to start making her way via Sekondi-Takoradi, Ghana, towards Liverpool. On April 10 while off the coast of Liberia, the ship had encountered a German submarine and a gun duel had ensued. The guns of the U-boat were apparently of a greater range than those of Burutu and the merchant vessel was reportedly severely damaged but with, perhaps surprisingly, only a singly fatality reported.



Nightfall had allowed the ship to evade any further attentions of the submarine and *Burutu* was able to make her way to Sierra Leone where she had then put into the capital city and port of Freetown on April 12. There she was to wait for several months while repairs to the damage would be effected.



(Right: The photograph of the merchant ship SS 'Burutu' is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)

It is therefore not impossible, and perhaps even likely, that the west African port-city of Freetown was where Leading Seaman Bussey was to meet his ship - although of his means of having travelled to West Africa, there appears not to be any pertinent information. Whatever the case, he was surely on board when the vessel weighed anchor and sailed for the United Kingdom from the port of Freetown in a convoy of nine ships escorted by HM Armed Merchant Cruiser Almanzora.

On October 2, having neared the Western Approaches of the English Channel, a number of destroyers and patrol boats joined the convoy whereupon six of the nine vessels come from Africa – and the destroyers - departed for other destinations; the remaining vessels continued towards Liverpool.



(Right above: The photograph of the ship 'City of Calcutta' which collided with the SS 'Burutu' on October 3 of 1918 is from the Wikipedia web-site.)

On the late evening of October 3 the visibility was poor. To add to the rain and squalls, the high winds and rough seas, the ships had turned off their navigation lights. It was in these conditions she met the larger *City of Calcutta* sailing in the opposite direction.

The ships collided and within ten minutes *Burutu* had sunk, taking one-hundred and forty eight lives with her.

The son of William Bussey, railway worker, fisherman and farmer, and – although some records cite Lavina (sic) – likely of Patience Bussey, the family from Salmon Cove and Darrell's Hole, Port de Grave, he was also older brother to George-Frederick.

As cited in a preceding paragraph, Leading Seaman Bussey was married in May of 1918. The young lady was a Miss Dora West of 26, Rose Street, in the Yorkshire town of Middlesborough and the ceremony had been performed on the eighteenth day of that month.

(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)

(Right: This collage dedicated to the memory of Leading Seaman Jacob Bussey, Number 1742x, is from the Virtual War Memorial, Veterans' Affairs, Canada, to which it has been donated by the Bussey Family of Port de Grave, Newfoundland.)

Leading Seaman Jacob Bussey was reported as having died on October 3, 1918, as a result of the sinking of the SS *Burutu*; date of birth in Salmon Cove, District of Port de Grave, Newfoundland, June 23, 1896 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register, a copy of Newfoundland Vital Statistics and from his enlistment papers, all of which cite his mother's name as having been *Patience*).

Leading Seaman Bussey 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.

Leading Seaman Jacob Bussey was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and 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.