



Seaman William Cadwell, Number 1375x is not commemorated on a bronze beneath the Caribou at the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel. Having been transferred from the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) to the Royal Naval Reserve – and assigned the Service Number 17450DA – he is honoured with others of those of the Royal Navy who have no known last resting-place but the sea, on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial.

Having decided to answer the call of the naval authorities for volunteers, William Cadwell relinquished his occupation as that of fisherman – perhaps working for *J.C. Baird* - working out of the capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland and, on November 18 of

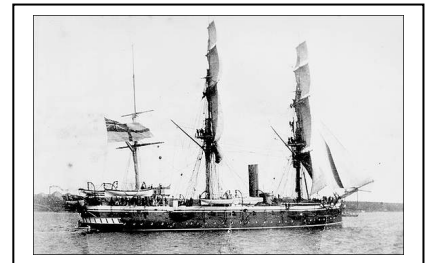
that 1914, reported...to duty...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS Calypso, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that same mid-November day he enlisted for the first time into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for a single year of war-time service and then underwent the required medical assessment. William Cadwell most likely was then also to attest, 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)



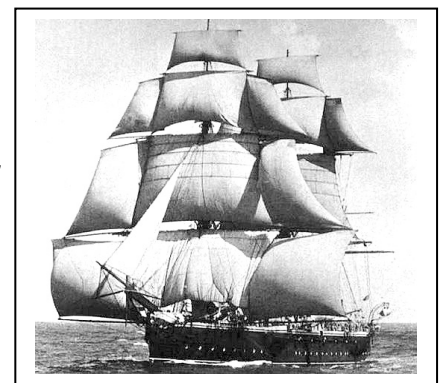
Expenses were apparently defrayed for the most part by the British (Imperial) Government and an attempt was made to ensure the number of recruits would be kept constantly at a maximum. This practice and policy was then to be continued up until the onset of hostilities some twelve years later.

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)

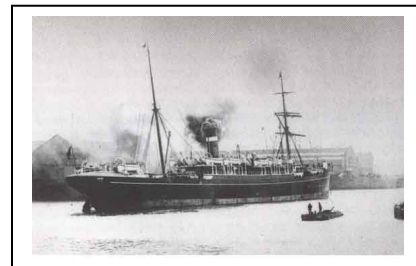
An elderly vessel, HMS 'Calypso', having become surplus to the Admiralty's needs, had been provided to the Dominion of Newfoundland by the Royal Navy in 1902 for training purposes. After some debate it was eventually decided that she would be permanently moored in the harbour of the capital, her superstructure 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 by the Royal Navy in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty House.)

(continued)

Thirty days after having first reported to *Calypso* in St. John's, on December 17 – at this point having been promoted the day before from the rank of *Seaman Recruit* – the now-Seaman Cadwell 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.



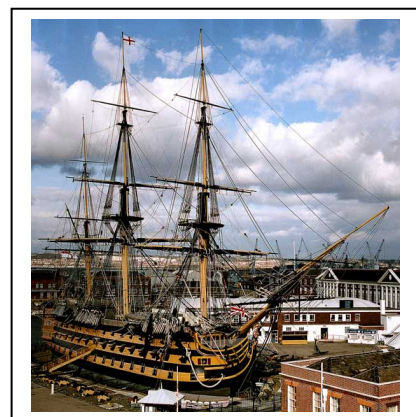
(Right above: *Built in 1891 for use by the 'Allan Line' for the transport of emigrants from Europe to North America, 'Mongolian' was a slow vessel with a speed of just twelve knots and was, by 1914, becoming obsolescent. She was nevertheless to be bought in 1914 for use by the Admiralty and remained 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)*

As seen above, Glasgow was to be Seaman Cadwell's draft's destination. Upon disembarkation 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 sited around the coast of southern England.

In the case of Seaman Cadwell, the destination was to be HMS *Victory I**, the Royal Navy port and facilities of Plymouth-Devonport at almost the other end of the country.

**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 it was 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.



(Right above: *HMS 'Victory' is seen here in dry dock in the southern English naval port-city of Portsmouth where she has been since the late 1920s – photograph from Wikipedia)*

Thus, HMS 'Victory', the base to which Seaman Cadwell had been ordered after his arrival in the United Kingdom from Newfoundland, was not only all the buildings and facilities on shore, but also HMS 'Victory' the warship, the vessel from which Admiral Nelson had

directed the Battle of Trafalgar – although the ship’s illustrious history is not limited to that one single incident.

It was also the name which all the sailors attached to HMS ‘Victory’ were to have emblazoned on the bands of their caps.

Furthermore, these establishments were at times divided into sections: ‘Victory I’ was where personnel (as opposed to the engine-room personnel, for example, in ‘Victory II’) such as Seaman Cadwell were to be stationed while awaiting a posting to one of His Majesty’s ships.

That awaited posting came on May 6 of 1915, some five months following Seaman Cadwell’s arrival in Portsmouth, although it was apparently a transfer only on paper to the *Royal Naval Reserve Trawler Section* as a Deck Hand and, as seen above, with a new service number – 17450DA.

He was possibly to remain at *Victory I* with perhaps still no ship on the figurative horizon.

Apart from being a training station, a holding-barracks and an administrative centre, *Victory I* also was responsible for the operation of a number of vessels large and small. The smaller craft were often requisitioned and armed fishing-vessels such as trawlers and drifters which worked as escort and patrol vessels, as mine-sweepers and harbour-defence ships*.

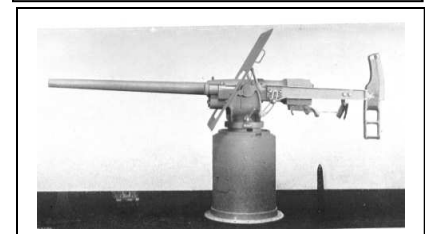
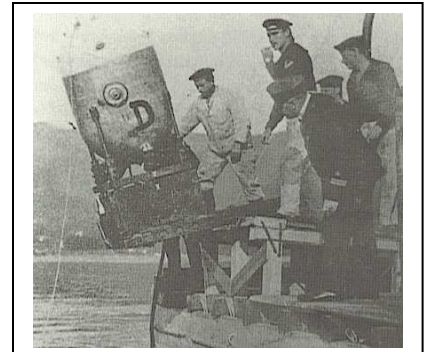
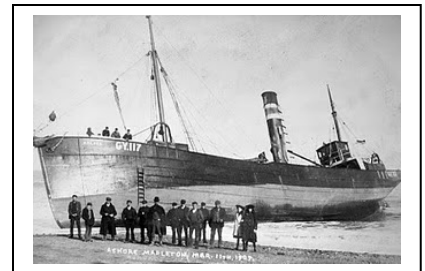
**Their crews were often a part of the Royal Naval Reserve and served with their ships – supplemented by other naval personnel such as gunners, for example – in war-time as in peace-time.*

During the War, 1456 such vessels were requisitioned from ports around the British Isles and even elsewhere, of which two-hundred sixty-four were to be lost.

His Majesty’s Trawler ‘Borneo’, a two-hundred eleven ton ship built in 1906 and from the east-coast fishing-town and port of Grimsby, was requisitioned in 1914, refitted and armed with a single six-pounder quick-firing gun. She began her war-time service as a mine-sweeper in November of that first year of the *Great War*.

(Right above: *This is a picture of the Grimsby trawler ‘Aucuba’ of the same weight and design, and built in 1905, the year before ‘Borneo’, her sister-ship. She was also requisitioned in the Great War which she survived, having served as a boom-defence vessel from 1914 until 1919. – photograph from the PicUK web-site)*

(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)*



(Preceding page: *A Quick-Firing Hotchkiss six-pounder gun such as would had been mounted on 'Borneo' – from Wikipedia*)

There appears to be no record available which documents the date on which Seaman Cadwell set foot for the first time on the deck of HMT *Borneo*. Nor does there seem to be any information pertaining to the perhaps two years and two weeks that he was to spend as part of her crew other than that *Borneo* was a ship of the *Auxiliary Patrol* operating out of the port of Newhaven on the coast of England almost directly south of London.

However, there *is* a personal eye-witness account of the events of June 18 of 1917. It is here below re-produced from the *Tunbridge Wells Sub Aqua Club* web-site.

The commander of naval vessel TB22 reported to his senior officer in the early hours of June 18, 1917 that he had discovered an enemy minefield off Beachy Head. Two sweepers were sent straight away to search the area and destroy the mines; they were Grenadier and her sweeping partner Borneo.

They got on with the job and soon the mines were being located and sunk by rifles using mine-sinking ammunition. Lieutenant Christopher McCready RNVR, commander of ML529 said that he was sent out with Lieutenant H.G. Phillips, senior commander in HMT Ocean Queen, to find and assist Grenadier and Borneo and that they caught up with them at about 3.45 pm. Lieutenant Phillips went aboard ML529 and was taken over to Grenadier to give her commander further minesweeping instructions. Whilst this was going on another mine had been located by Borneo making 10 in total for the area. ML529 and Grenadier approached the mine and blew it up with rifle fire.

It was 5.50 pm and the disturbance from the exploding mine was just beginning to die away when there was another explosion. Matthew McCrindle, a deck hand on Borneo, said in a statement from a hospital bed in Newhaven, that he was standing on lookout in the bows at the time. The rest of the crew were near the winch when there was a huge explosion from directly under the ship. He put his hands over his head to try and shield himself from the shrapnel but he was hit with a piece, The Borneo was completely blown to pieces but by some miracle he found himself floating in the water. For 10 minutes he swam around before being picked up by ML529.

The mate of Grenadier, James Frederick Ostcliffe, said that they went in among the wreckage straight away and found one man wounded, another unhurt, but also found two dead men.

A Court of Enquiry was held at 2 pm on Saturday June 23, 1917, at the Royal Navy Barracks, Newhaven. The court's findings were that Borneo had been sunk by misadventure in striking a submerged enemy mine, but that no person present was in any way responsible for the sinking*.

Of the crew of thirteen, two survived. Two of the dead were from the Royal Naval Canadian Volunteer Reserve; Seaman William Cadwell is recorded as the only Newfoundland casualty.

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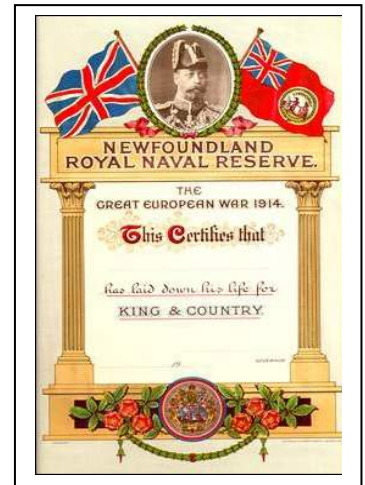
****The party responsible was the German submarine UC-17 which had laid the mines only days before in a field some eight kilometres south by west of the cliff area known as 'Beachy Head'.***

(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 son of James Cadwell, seaman, and of Eliza Jane Cadwell (née Miller*), latterly of 171/2 Duggan Street, St. John's, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Susannah-Florence.

****The couple had been married in the capital city on December 15, 1886.***

Seaman William Cadwell was recorded as having died on that June 18, 1917, at the reported age of twenty-one years: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, January 2 of 1896 (from his enlistment papers) – although Vital Statistics appear to record his sister's birth on June 11, 1895.



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



****As the memorials in England, at the wreck-site and in the above-cited sources all remember him as B. Cadwell, it is surely likely that his friends, family and crew-mates knew him as Bill.***

*****A second source has him as eligible for the World War 1 Naval War Medal – a decoration that appears not to have existed.***

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.