



Surgeon Harold Garrett Chaplin, his body one of the one-hundred recovered following the sinking of HMS *Hampshire*, lies in Lyness Royal Naval Cemetery on the banks of Scapa Flow* in the Orkney Islands to the north of Scotland.

****Scapa Flow was the base for the Royal Navy's Grand Fleet and served as such during both World Wars.***

(Above: The photographs of Lyness Royal Naval Cemetery are from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission web-site.)

Harold Garrett was a doctor of the Royal Navy. As a young boy and adolescent he grew up in St. John's on Cochrane Street before the family moved for a goodly number of years to Rennie's Mill Road. The Business Directory of 1913 shows that, by that time, Circular Road was the residence of Mark and Amelia Jane Chaplin, but for how long Harold Garrett Chaplin was to live there is not clear as in 1908 he was initiating a medical career at St. Thomas' Hospital in London.

His father had also by then purportedly become the most eminent – and successful - tailor in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, having begun his own business as such in the year 1875, and at the end of that century had also ventured into politics to sit as a Member of the Newfoundland House of Assembly for some ten years,

from 1897 until 1908. He and his wife were to parent a large family to eventually comprise eleven children of which Harold Garrett was the fourth-born.

At school – the Methodist College in St. John’s – he proved to be not only a first-class student but an excellent athlete. Eventually Harold Garrett Chaplin decided upon medicine as a career – as had at least one of his brothers, Herbert – and was sent to London to study.

Following six years of studies he graduated with a degree in medicine, having led his class in the final examinations, thus claiming the Gold Medal in Medicine. He was thereupon appointed to be one of the hospital’s house surgeons.

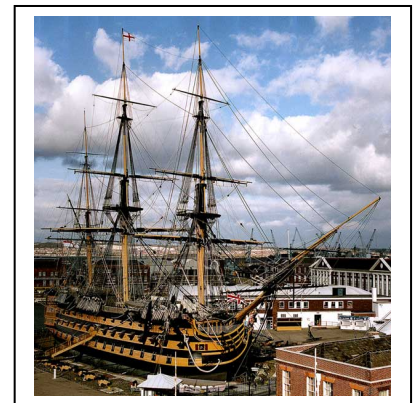
The year – alas! – was 1914.

When war was declared on August 4 between the British and German Empires, Doctor Chaplin applied for a commission in the Royal Army Medical Corps, a request which was subsequently granted. It is reported that he was thereupon to depart for the Continent...*in charge of a squad of twenty men*...where he served for a term of several months.

The reason for his decision to transfer from the RAMC to the Royal Navy appears not to have been documented, but his first appointment having received a commission as a Lieutenant-Surgeon in the Senior Service was to be to HMS *Victory*. Whether he was there* to serve in his capacity as a doctor and surgeon, often differentiated in those days, or whether it was to undergo basic training in seamanship and in the ways of the Royal Navy is not clear.

**The major hospital serving the Royal Navy at the time was the Royal Hospital, Haslar, Gosport; it was apparently not a component of HMS ‘Victory’ but an entity under itself – complete with surgical ward.*

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 awaiting a posting to one of His Majesty’s ships, a facility which had originally been based in the naval city and port of Portsmouth*; and 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.



**In many cases the large influx of personnel due to the War necessitated some 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)

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*****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.***

Surgeon Chaplin's next attachment was at sea, to HMHS* Agadir.**

****Many of the British hospital ships of the Great War were either hired or requisitioned on a temporary basis and were therefore officially not 'His Majesty's' ships. 'Agadir' apparently was a bona fide Navy ship, although converted, not built, to be a hospital ship, and coming into service as such in November of 1914.***

The distinction may have also had to do with the personnel; the requisitioned hospital ships were usually served by RAMC personnel and often nurses of the Queen Alexandra's and Queen Mary's nursing organizations; the naval hospital ships apparently had naval medical personnel on board although likely nurses from the same sources.

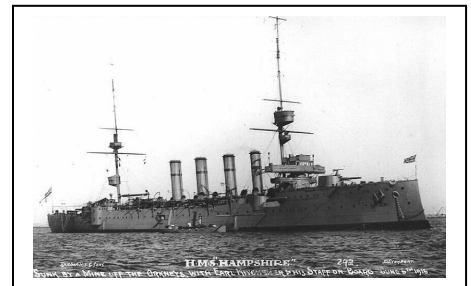
Many sources make no distinction between the two categories.

*****HMHS 'Agadir' was the hospital ship attached to the Grand Fleet that dealt almost solely with infectious cases. This being so, she was likely to have served primarily at Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands which is where the Grand Fleet was stationed for much of the Great War.***



(Right above: An operating theatre on board a hospital ship of the Great War, perhaps HMHS 'Plassy' – from facebook.com)

When it was that Surgeon Chaplin was transferred from HMHS Agadir to the D-Class cruiser HMS Hampshire of the 7th – or the 2nd - Cruiser Squadron is not clear. Her log books are available up until the end of February of 1915 by which time the vessel had been attached to the 7th Cruiser Squadron, an entity of the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow - although the 7th CS was also based elsewhere, at Cromarty Firth on the east coast of Scotland at times, its duties including patrolling the northern region of the North Sea.



(Right above: The photograph of the cruiser HMS Hampshire is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Built as an Devonshire (D)-Class armoured cruiser, the title soon reduced simply to cruiser, she had been launched in 1903. Weighing 10,850 tons, and with a top speed of twenty-two knots (forty kilometres per hour), she was armed with four 7.5-inch guns, six 6-inch guns, two 12-pounders plus two 18-inch torpedo-tubes and the thickness of her armour ranged six to two inches thick.

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In November of that 1915 she was sent to Russian waters, the White Sea and ports such as Archangel and Murmansk – the last-named town still under construction at the time.

However, it was apparently not to be until the spring of 1916 that Surgeon Chaplin was transferred – on a temporary basis – to HMS *Hampshire* which by then had necessarily returned to the protective waters of *Scapa Flow*, this having likely been the occasion when the ship was also transferred from the 7th to the 2nd Cruiser Squadron.

The British Grand Fleet and the German High Seas Fleet were soon to be involved in what was to be the only large-scale confrontation - known in English as the *Battle of Jutland* - of the *Great War*, Jutland being the Danish peninsula which separates the Baltic Sea from the North Sea.

HMS Hampshire and the other ships of the 2nd Cruiser Squadron sailed from *Scapa Flow** on May 30 but they were to be apparently only peripherally involved in the encounter which lasted little more than a day and a night. By the time the fighting had come to its inconclusive end the British had lost fourteen vessels and some five-thousand, seven-hundred personnel: the Germans eleven ships and two-thousand, five hundred sailors – but the German High Seas Fleet had retired to its harbours, not to leave them again for the remainder of the *Great War*.

**Other British ships joined the Force from the ports of Invergordon and Rosyth.*

Hampshire returned to *Scapa Flow* on June 1 having incurred neither casualties nor damage.

However, it is not recorded whether Surgeon Chaplin was one of her complement during the afore-mentioned *Battle of Jutland*.

The *Great War* by this time had been ongoing for almost two years and had not been progressing very well for either side; it was, and would remain for the next two years, a stalemate...perhaps except for the *Eastern Front*.

There, things had been going badly for the army of the Tsar. Despite the Russians' overwhelming preponderance in manpower, the Germans had the upper hand – and would have it for the next number of months until such time as the Russians were to be forced to capitulate, an event which would help to bring about the two Russian Revolutions of 1917.

A diplomatic meeting of the Russians and the British had thus been arranged, with the British mission headed by the Minister for War, Field Marshal Earl Kitchener of Khartoum*. Access to Russia at the time from Great Britain was obviously not straightforward, thus it was decided to travel by ship around Norway, Sweden and the Grand Duchy of Finland which at the time was for all intents and purposes, a part of the Russian Empire. The travellers would disembark in the port of Archangel to travel from there to the capital of St. Petersburg.



The delegation was to travel to Archangel on HMS *Hampshire*.

**For whom the community of 'Kitchener', Ontario, was named in 1916, its name changed from 'Berlin'.*

(Preceding page: The recruiting poster which displays probably the best-known likeness of Kitchener)

HMS Hampshire steamed from Scapa Flow at fifteen minutes to five on the afternoon of June 5, 1916, into a worsening storm - because of which the two escorting destroyers were to be ordered back to the base. Hampshire proceeded into waters that had not been swept for enemy mines for a week and was still in close vicinity to the main island of Orkney when she struck one of them.

She sank within fifteen minutes, there being only twelve survivors of the six-hundred seventy on board.



(Right above: The photograph of Lieutenant-Surgeon Harold Garrett Chaplin is from the Gower Remembers web-site.)

The son of Mark Chaplin (also found as *Chaplain*), tailor, and of Amelia Jane Chaplin (née *Bowden**, deceased of cardio-vascular sclerosis on August 12, 1920 in the United States) of St. John's, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Herbert-L.-Shenton, Nellie-G., Marion-Morton, Claude-Maitland, Doris-S., Mabel-Leslie and John-Fielding** and as many as three other siblings.

He was also to leave behind him Miss Jane Kendall of St. John's to whom he had been engaged.



**The couple was married in St. John's on April 22 of 1879.*

Surgeon Harold Garrett (this his grandmother's – on his father's side – maiden name) Chaplin...*drowned in the sinking of HMS Hampshire while bandaging the wounded after the explosion on 5th June, 1916**...at the age of twenty-eight years: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, March 10, 1888 (from the *Gower Remembers* web-site as is other information in this file and from a copy of Topsail Parish Records).

**Cited from the University of London Student Records.*

(Right above: This family memorial which stands in the General Protestant Cemetery in St. John's commemorates the dead of the Chaplin family, including the two brothers who died in service, Harold Garrett and John Fielding – photograph from 2015)

Surgeon Harold Garrett Chaplin was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



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*****John (known as Jack) Fielding Chaplin had presented himself at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on August 28 of 1914. By the end of that September he had enlisted, likely attested and undergone weeks of preliminary training.***

On that October 4 he sailed as one of the First Five Hundred for the United Kingdom on board 'Florizel' to reach Plymouth Harbour some ten days later in the company of the Canadian Division.

Having trained for long, cold and wet weeks on Salisbury Plain, the Newfoundland contingent – not yet numerous enough to form a battalion – was sent to Scotland, to Fort George, in the vicinity of the community of Inverness and its well-known Loch.

There at Forth George he was struck by an unspecified abdominal disease thought to be associated to the liver – a second source cites pneumonia – and which other sources record as having been appendicitis.

He died on New year's Day of 1915, the first overseas fatality of the Newfoundland Regiment during the Great War. Jack Fielding Chaplin had enlisted at a declared nineteen years of age: date of birth in St. John's Newfoundland, April 6, 1897 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).

(Right above: Private Chaplin's grave in Ardesier Parish Churchyard. – photograph from 2011)

(Right above: The photograph of a youthful John Fielding Chaplin is from the Provincial Archives.)

A more complete account of his all-too brief military career is to be found elsewhere among these files.

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.

