



Seaman Allan Daniel Sceviour, Number 1401x, is buried in the General Protestant Cemetery on Waterford Bridge Road in St. John's.

Having decided to *answer the call* of the naval authorities for volunteers, he thereupon relinquished his employment at the *City Club* in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on November 24 of 1914, Allan Sceviour reported...*to duty*...on the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that same November 24 he enlisted into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for a single year's war-time service* and 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 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, 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: 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)

(continued)

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



SS Mongolian

(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*)

**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 for Seaman Sceviour's draft. Upon disembarkation the Naval Reserve personnel would thereupon have been either posted directly to a ship or ordered to undergo further training at one of various Royal Navy establishments – these for the most part in England.

In the case of Seaman Sceviour, the destination was to be *HMS Victory I**, the Royal Navy port and facilities of Portsmouth at almost the other end of the country - although exactly what his occupations, apart from waiting, were to be during this period of wearing a cap-band emblazoned *HMS Victory* is not clear.

**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.

Thus, HMS 'Victory', the base to which Seaman Sceviour 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 afore-mentioned caps.

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

(Right: 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)



Seaman Sceviour remained at *Victory I* for eleven months less three days, December 18, 1914 until November 15 of the year following – although this was to include the time spent traversing the Atlantic. The Navy apparently had plans for him to serve on one of its smaller vessels as, during this period, he was transferred to the Royal Naval Reserve’s Trawler Section, there to be categorized as a *Deck Hand*.

However, this aforementioned service was apparently not to come about on this occasion as his year of pledged war-time service was now to expire and it would seem that at the time Seaman Sceviour had no desire or intention to prolong it. He was thus placed on the books of another shore-based naval establishment, HMS *Pembroke*, at the naval town of Chatham in the county of Kent, and likely spent some two weeks in the barracks there while awaiting passage back to Newfoundland.

He is recorded as officially once again having been placed on the nominal roll of HMS *Calypso*, the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve training-vessel, this on December 3, to remain enrolled there until April 24 of 1916*. That December 3 was the date on which he had sailed on the *Canadian Pacific* steamer *Missanabie* from Liverpool for home and although one source cites St John’s as his destination, a second has St. John, and a third has the more likely Halifax. There appears to be no further information available.

By the above-mentioned April 24 of 1916 of course, and as recorded in a previous paragraph, HMS *Calypso*, on January 31 of 1916, had been re-commissioned as HMS *Briton*. And also by this time, documented in his Service Records, on January 10 Seaman Sceviour had reconsidered, had undergone a further medical assessment, and had been prevailed upon to re-engage in His Majesty’s Service – and again in the Newfoundland Naval Reserve - on this second occasion for the *Duration of the War*.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *The C-Class cruiser ‘Calypso’ of 1916, seen here on an un-recorded date during the later years of the Great War, was to be sunk by an Italian submarine in 1940. – from Wikipedia)*

Seaman Sceviour was to serve on HMS *Calypso* until January 30 of that year of 1916 at which time the vessel was re-commissioned as HMS *Briton*. He was then to remain on *Briton* awaiting a call to overseas service for a further eighty-three days.

The records show that he was struck off the books of HMS *Briton* on April 23 of that year and transferred to the nominal roll of HMS *Vivid II* (see below) on the following day, April 24. Thus, as it had been those sixteen months before, a certain number of the days attached to *Vivid II* were not to be spent in England but on a ship crossing the Atlantic from Newfoundland to the United Kingdom.



That ship was the SS *Pretorian*, an *Allan Line* ship – the Company if not the vessel itself well-known in St. John’s – which since 1904 had been running the commercial route between Glasgow and the Canadian ports of Québec and Montréal, and had perhaps deviated from it to embark the naval reservist draft on that occasion. The vessel sailed from St. John’s en route to the United Kingdom on or about that April 23, 1916.

(Right above: *This un-dated photograph of the Allan Line ship SS ‘Pretorian’ in the Prince’s Dock in the Scottish City of Glasgow is from the web-site ‘Tangled Roots and Trees’ in which it is shown by courtesy of the Graham Lappin Collection.*)

Upon his arrival in the United Kingdom for this second time, Seaman Sceviour was ordered to report to HMS *Vivid II* at Devonport. This Division had originally been a training station for stokers – the Royal Navy still ran mostly on coal – and other engine-room personnel, but it was also to provide a holding barracks for seamen as they awaited their dispatch to a posting on board one of His Majesty’s ships.



(Right: *A main gateway to the once-Royal Navy establishment at Plymouth-Devonport – photograph from 2011(?)*)

On September 6-7, Seaman Sceviour was to be transferred – at least on paper – from *Vivid II* to an elderly vessel, HMS *Royalist*, which in 1913 had been re-commissioned as HMS *Colleen*.

As was the case with HMS *Victory* at Portsmouth, there were two *Colleens*: one was a vessel of that name which was now the depot ship – and administrative centre – for the war-time naval base which bore the same name, and which was located at Queenstown (today *Cobh*, pronounced as *Cove*) on the southern coast of Ireland*.

****Ireland at the time of the Great War was a British possession and one of the British Isles. It was during the period between the two World Wars that the country became the independent nation that it is today.***

Queenstown – named as such in 1849 for a visiting Queen Victoria – had already by that time been an important naval base since the Napoleonic Wars and was to remain so during the remainder of the years of British sovereignty. As one might surmise, it lost none of that importance during the years of the *Great War*.

As with most of the other vessels which shared their name with a shore-based establishment – *Pembroke*, *Vivid*, *Ceto* etc., HMS *Colleen* was not to venture out into the perils of the high seas. But there was a number of smaller vessels operating out of Queenstown for whom the depot ship was responsible in such matters as financial expenditure – crews' wages for example - personnel, supplies, armaments et al..



(Right above: HMS 'Royalist', seen here before becoming HMS 'Colleen', was a hybrid corvette – both sail and steam – built in 1883, and was in many ways similar to HMS 'Calypso' (later 'Briton'), the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve training-ship. – photograph from Wikipedia)

It is not recorded whether Seaman Sceviour served on board HMS *Colleen* the depot ship afloat, or at HMS *Colleen* the adjoining facilities on land, but it *is* documented that he was to become a member of the crew on board one of those *smaller vessels*: the fleet-sweeping Flower-class sloop, HMS *Sunflower*.



(Right: The image of HMS 'Acacia', sister-ship to 'Sunflower' is from the Wikipedia web-site.)

Sunflower and her sister-ships were all recently-built vessels of the Royal Navy, not requisitioned civilian craft. Constructed for mine-sweeping purposes in and about 1915, they were also later in the War to be used as escorts for merchant shipping. To that end they were progressively armed with two twelve-pounder naval guns, two three-pounder quick-firing anti-aircraft weapons and, to discourage any attack by enemy submarines, a battery of depth-charges. Following her Irish service, *Sunflower* was to serve in the Mediterranean and subsequently sold soon after the War.



(Right above: *Minelaying* from a German surface vessel during the *Great War*: these were for the most part contact mines. – from the 'NavWeaps' web-site)

(Right: A photographic example of the aforesaid Hotchkiss 3-pounder gun as reportedly mounted on 'Sunflower' – from 'Wikipedia')



Seaman Sceviour was to serve on *Sunflower* while on *Colleen's* books until January 31 of 1917. Then what transpired is not entirely clear: while he was to remain with *Sunflower* for a further sixty-six days he was administratively transferred to *Victorious II*.

Victorious II was the ex-pre-Dreadnought battleship *Prince George* which, having served in the *Gallipoli Campaign*, had returned to England, to the naval town of Chatham, in March of 1916, there to be taken out of active service, dis-armed, and to be used as an accommodation ship for submarine crews. She apparently was to be handed some administrative duties as well – including the well-being of Seaman Sceviour.

He was to serve on HMS *Sunflower* for altogether nine months – a period which was apparently to pass without any untoward incident - until April 4 of 1917, when he returned to *Vivid*, but now to *Vivid III* which was the Royal Naval Division Trawler Section. His tenure there was to be short-lived, only seventeen days, before he was dispatched – or at least bureaucratically transferred - to the Principality of Wales.

Milford Haven was a busy place as the town and its harbour were situated at a point where the Atlantic Ocean becomes the Irish Sea going northwards and the English Channel flowing past the south coast of England before in turn veering through the Dover Straits and into the North Sea. Much of the so-called Western Approaches to Great Britain was thus the responsibility of the Royal Navy based at Milford Haven.

By the time of Seaman Sceviour's posting there, the base itself had become *Idaho*, once more named for the depot-parent ship moored there, in this case a requisitioned yacht. However, the scope of his duties there appears not to have been noted.

Forty-eight days later he was once more on the nominal roll of HMS *Briton* in St. John's, although as seen further above, this period may have included the time of his trans-Atlantic passage. It was then likely that once in Newfoundland, he was granted some furlough.

There now appears to be a five-month interlude in Seaman Sceviour's service records which one may perhaps suppose was divided between the afore-mentioned furlough – usually a month in duration – and duties on board *Briton*.

His name then appears on the passenger list of the SS *Kyle* for November 28, 1917, and the crossing of the Cabot Strait from Port aux Basques to North Sydney – undoubtedly having traversed the island of Newfoundland from St. John's on the express train. He was thereupon to join the ship's complement on board HMCS *Niobe* in the harbour at Halifax*.



**The date of his attachment to HMCS 'Niobe' is shown to be November 27 but as seen above, this was to include the days on which he had travelled.*

The ship, an elderly cruiser, had been ceded to the fledgling Canadian Navy in 1910 by the British. Having served with the 4th Cruiser Squadron in the early years of the *Great War* – with a hundred Newfoundland Reservists seconded to provide a part of her crew – she

had thereupon been retired to become the Depot Ship of the Royal Canadian Navy in Halifax Harbour for the remainder of the conflict.

(Preceding page: *The photograph of HMCS 'Niobe' seen here at anchor is from a Canadian Government web-site.*)

There was now to occur in Halifax Harbour an event as horrendous as anything that Seaman Sceviour might have experienced during the war-time years: the Halifax Explosion.

On December 6, a week after Seaman Sceviour had reported *to duty*, 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. 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.

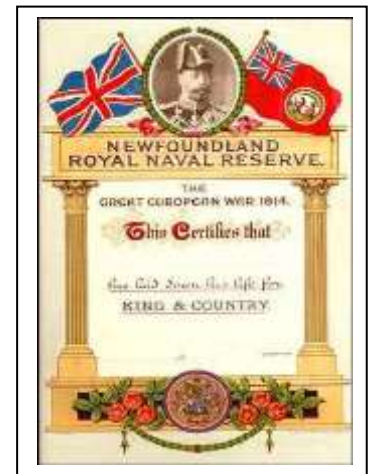


(Right above: *A view of an obliterated Halifax with its harbour in the distance, the photograph taken two days after the incident. – from 'Wikipedia'*)

(Right above: *'Niobe' 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. – The photograph of a damage Niobe is from the Canadian War Museum web-site.*)

The role played by Seaman Sceviour on that December day does not appear among his papers. He was thus to remain posted to *Niobe* in Halifax Harbour for the next several months until the final day in September of 1918.

Although his files continue to record him as serving on *Niobe* after that September 30, it is likely that he returned to St. John's at that time, possibly even to enter directly into hospital upon his arrival there. The pandemic known to history as the Spanish 'Flu was already taking its toll and although it is not confirmed, Seaman Sceviour may well have been exhibiting the symptoms by the time of his homeward journey.



The son of Isaac James Sceviour (also found as *Sevier* and *Seviour*), fisherman, and of Elizabeth (also confusingly found as *Isabella*) Sceviour*, of Robinson's Point, Random

Island, Trinity Bay, Newfoundland – Shoal Harbour also found - before the family moved to the Southside Road in St. John's, he was brother to Willie Job and half-brother to John Charles, Hannah Jane and Elizabeth*.

**Their mother was Mary Jane Sale(?) whom Isaac James Sevier had married in Randell's (perhaps Rendell's Harbour) on October 14 of 1876.*

(Preceding page: 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 Allan Daniel Barter Sceviour is recorded as having *died of disease* in the General Hospital, St. John's, on October 12, 1918, at the *reported* age of twenty-two years. Date of birth on Random Island, Trinity Bay, Newfoundland, December 12, 1895 (from his enlistment papers) but on September 12, 1896 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register as is the name *Barter*).

Seaman Sceviour served in the Royal Navy and was latterly seconded to the Royal Canadian Navy. The Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) was an entity of the Royal Navy, not the Royal Canadian Navy.

Seaman Allan Daniel Sceviour was entitled to the British War Medal (centre) and to 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 20, 2023.