



Seaman Melvin Titford, Number 1472x, lies in the Peterhead Old Churchyard in Scotland where he is commemorated on the Screen Wall as seen above.

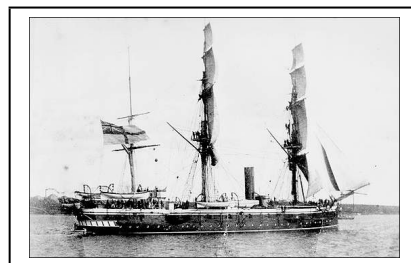
Having decided to *answer the call* of the naval authorities for volunteers, Melvin Titford relinquished his occupation as a fisherman in the Conception Bay community of Harbour Grace to travel to not-distant St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on December 10 of 1914, he reported...to *duty**...on board the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below) and was...*taken on strength*.

(continued)

On that December 10 he enlisted for the first time into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for a single year* and underwent the required medical assessment on the morrow. He also likely attested at this time, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V.

(Preceding page: *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.*

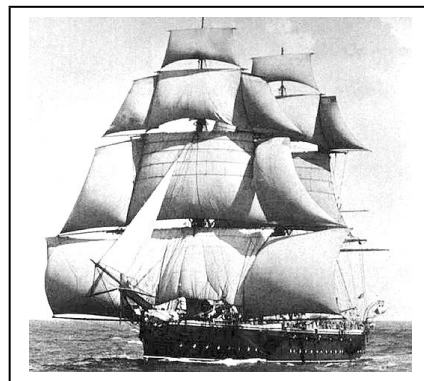
Note: *During the years preceding the Great War the only military force on the Island of Newfoundland – apart from a handful of ill-fated local attempts – was to be the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland). Even so, it was to be some thirty years after the withdrawal of British troops from the Dominion in 1870 before the Reserve came into being in 1902.*



(continued)

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.

(Preceding page: 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)



(Right: 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)

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: 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.

Twenty-eight days after having first reported to Calypso in St. John's, on January 7 Seaman Titford was promoted from his status of Seaman Recruit to that of Seaman; it would then appear that twenty-eight days later again, on February 4 of that 1915, he was to depart from St. John's to cross the Atlantic – this suggested by the dates documented in his sparse service file.

On that date, the detachment of volunteers for the Army that upon its arrival at Edinburgh Castle was to become 'C' Company of the Newfoundland contingent in the United Kingdom, boarded the tender *Neptune* in St. John's Harbour for the short journey down the coast to Bay Bulls. There the ocean-going vessel *Dominion* awaited to carry it across the Atlantic and it might be assumed that the Naval Reservists were to be a part of that contingent.



(Right above: *The photograph of personnel of 'C' Company on board the 'Neptune' on the way to the harbour at Bay Bulls is from the Provincial Archives.*)

The available sources do not, however, record any Newfoundland naval reservists taking passage on *Dominion*. In fact, *Calypso's* Drill Register of the time records that the personnel were to leave St. John's on board the *Allan Line* vessel, the *SS Mongolian*, on February 17 – although the ship's captain records (see below) that it was the 18th.

The situation seems to have been a bit more complicated than that: Days before, according to the local newspapers, on that February 4-5, *Mongolian* had left St. John's to attempt to force a passage through the heavy ice surrounding the entrance to St. John's and extending well offshore. It was to no avail and after three days of futile effort the ship returned to port.

In re-entering St. John's Harbour, however, the vessel struck a rock and, after inspection, it was decided necessary to do emergency repairs in the local dock. In the meantime some of the vessel's passengers were to take the train across the island so as to catch another ship in Halifax.

On or about February 23, the repairs having been completed, *Mongolian* departed Newfoundland once again, only to be immediately met with heavy seas which eventually were to at least partially undo much of the temporary work which had been completed to the ship only days before.

The following is an adaption of a letter written by *Mongolian's* captain after his ship had reached the safety of the harbour of Halifax on February 25. It was addressed to Lieutenant-Commander McDermott of *HMS Calypso* who saw fit to forward it to the Office of the Colonial Secretary – whence it made its way to the local press.

Dear Sir:-

It is but just that I submit the following to your notice.

As you are aware, the ship under my command left St. John's 18th February with 200 R.N.R. ratings from your ship under the command of Captain Alan Goodridge. On their arrival on board '*Mongolian*' Captain Goodridge at once established regular discipline and routine.

Shortly after leaving port rough and foggy weather was encountered and as ship proceeded East this weather became worse each day. On 22nd and 23rd a heavy gale raged from North-East with very high seas, causing the ship to labour considerably. On the latter date trouble arose through the giving-out of temporary repairs done in St. John's. Considerable water was found making its way into the fore end of the ship. After consultation I decided to return here to Halifax.

I requested Captain Goodridge with ratings under his command to assist me in every way consistent with requirements. It is needless to say such help was given in the most energetic and cheerful manner by way of preparing for any emergency. Manning deck pumps (which were kept going day and night until arrival into port). Also a number of men were detailed to assist in the engine room and stokehold. (Chief Engineer Brown of this ship desires me to specially mention the valuable assistance of these men.

For my part I cannot speak too highly of Captain Goodridge. His cheerful and composed manner throughout went far to inspire confidence not only in the men under his command but also the passengers entrusted to my care.

I would request, Sir, that you would be good enough to forward to His Excellency the Governor my appreciation for the assistance so ably rendered by him. I would also ask you to place on record my high opinion of Petty Officer George Gill and Armourer Luxon.

The entire staff of my ship join with me in thanking the men of the Newfoundland Reserve whose conduct throughout was most exemplary and helpful in every way.

I may say that almost immediately upon arrival here the men were transferred to the SS 'Scandinavian' and sailed about 9 p.m..

J.W. Hatherly
Master S.S. Mongolian

(Right: The SS 'Mongolian' was an elderly vessel constructed in 1891. Built for the Allan Line Company she was to have served as a troopship during the Boer War before being bought by the British Admiralty, again for war service, in 1914 or 1915. She was not to survive the conflict: on July 21 of 1918 she was torpedoed and sunk by U-boat 70 with a loss of thirty-five lives. – The photograph of Mongolian is from the British Home Child Group International web-site.)



Once having disembarked from *Scandinavian* - on which they had journeyed from Halifax (see in letter above) - in the United Kingdom in early March, any Naval personnel would have been either posted directly to a ship or ordered to proceed to one of various Royal Navy establishments – these for the most part in England. In the case of Seaman Titford, the destination was to be HMS *Vivid I** at Plymouth-Devonport in the English county of Devon.

**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 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.

HMS 'Vivid', the base to which Seaman Titford had been ordered after his arrival in the United Kingdom from Newfoundland, was not only all the buildings and facilities on shore, but also a small, elderly, nondescript depot ship (originally HMS 'Cukoo', built 1873), to which all the naval personnel was attached and was the name to be emblazoned on the bands of their caps.

These establishments were at times divided into sections: 'Vivid I' was the holding-barracks where the seamen (as opposed to the engine-room personnel, for example, in 'Vivid II') such as Seaman Titford were to be stationed.

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



Seaman Titford was to serve at *Vivid I* from the time of his arrival in the United Kingdom until June 20 of 1915. During this period, on or about April 19, it appears that he was transferred to the *Armed Trawler Section* as a Deck Hand. But it was to be a further two months before he was to be able to put any new skills to a practical test.

Prior to that he was to be posted to another stone frigate (the name accorded to a land-based naval establishment): *Victory II*.

HMS *Victory*, like *Vivid*, was two entities: it was a training establishment originally, and perhaps primarily, based in the Naval city and port of Portsmouth; and it was also, as explained above, the ship to which the majority of the land-based personnel would have been, at least officially and bureaucratically attached, 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.

(Right: *HMS 'Victory' in dry dock in the southern English port-city of Portsmouth where she has been for a century – photograph from Wikipedia*)

As seen further above, shore bases and training establishments were often separated into different Divisions. *Victory II*, as with *Vivid II*, *Pembroke II* etc., was assigned for the training of stokers – many ships were still coal-fired – and of other engine-room specialists.

It was to *Victory II* that Seaman Titford was assigned but it was possibly not to Portsmouth that he was to be dispatched. For much of the *Great War*, *Victory II* was apparently to be found in the Greater London district of Crystal Palace.

At some apparently undocumented point during that two-month period of April 20 to June 20, Seaman Titford was ordered to be a crewman of the hired yacht, *Monsoon*.

(Right: *This is a photograph of the war-time HM Yacht Monsoon in war-time as witnessed by the gun mounted on her fore-deck. – image from the pierssc web-site*)

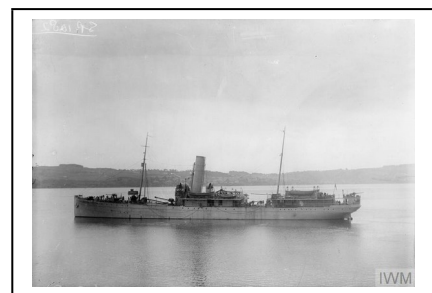


His Majesty's yacht *Monsoon* – in 1928 to become *Latharna* - was a three-hundred sixty-six ton yacht built and launched in 1897. Fitted with a war-time armament of two twelve-pounder guns she came into service on May 10, 1914 to serve until February 13, 1919. While the scope of her duties is not entirely clear the vessel appears to have served as a wireless-equipped *Auxiliary Patrol Group Leader* or in special yacht squadrons, both in home waters around the British Isles or perhaps in Mediterranean.



(Right above: *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, here seen adapted for use in 1941. – taken at the Royal Artillery Museum 'Firepower', Woolwich, in 2010*)

At or about the time of Seaman Titford's attachment to *Monsoon*, the yacht seems to have come under the authority of the squadron supply ship *HMS Stephen Furness**, that vessel only having come into service as such some five months before at the base on the Cromarty Firth, Scotland from where its duties extended northwards as far as Peterhead.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *The photograph of the 'Stephen Furness' is from the naval-history.net.uk. web-site.*)

**In 1916 she was converted into an armed boarding steamer. On December 13, 1917, en route to Liverpool she was torpedoed and sunk by the U-boat 64. Going down abruptly before the life-boats could be launched, she carried one-hundred one persons with her.*

Having been a member of *Monsoon's* crew for only a matter of weeks, Seaman Tifford, according to some sources, apparently fell ill. There appears to be no further information available although the monument in Harbour Grace seen below records him as having drowned, his body to be recovered and buried where it lies today. The Royal Naval records document simply that he died of...*illness*,

The son of William Robert Tifford (found also as *Tetford*) and of Ann Tifford (née *Norman**) he was also half-brother to William-James, Jessie, John, May-Bouclark (also found as *Bonclarke*) and Mary.

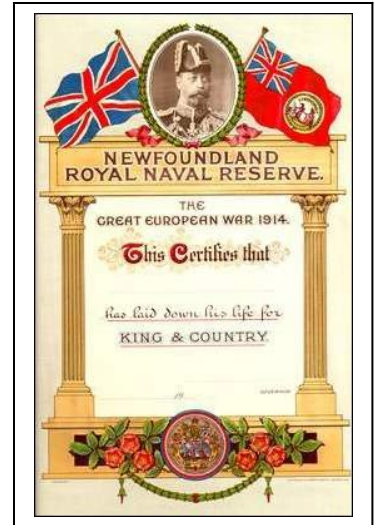
(Right above: *A Memorial Scroll, a copy of which was distributed to the families of those who had sacrificed their life while serving in the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve*)

**The couple had married in Harbour Grace on October 25 of 1889. Ann was the second wife of William Robert Tifford who had married Ann Elizabeth Bouclark (also found as Bonclarke, deceased on July 28 of 1888 aged thirty-seven years) in Harbour Grace on June 2, 1877.*

Seaman Tifford is *reported* as having died on July 30 of 1915 at the age of twenty-four years: date of birth in Harbour Grace, Newfoundland, June 1, 1894 (from the *Conception Bay Museum* files and from his enlistment papers).

(Right: *A family memorial which stands in the Anglican Cemetery in Harbour Grace commemorates the sacrifice of Melvin Tifford* photograph from 2012(?))

Seaman Tifford served only in the Royal Navy and was cited in some sources, notably the Commonwealth War



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