

Seaman Thomas Joseph Truscott, Number 1268x, is commemorated on one of the two screen walls of Anfield Cemetery, wherein he is also buried, in the English port-city of Liverpool: grave reference 5.R. 1799..

Having relinquished his occupation of the time as a seaman with his residence in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on October 28 of 1914 Thomas Joseph Truscott reported...*to duty*...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that same late-October 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 underwent the required medical assessment. Thomas Joseph Truscott most likely was then also to attest, 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.)**

**\*At the outset 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.**

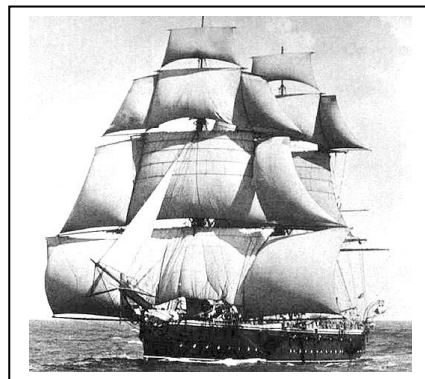
**Just fewer than four-hundred men were sought to enroll as seamen – apparently automatically at the rank of Able Seaman - and to present themselves annually in St. John's for five years in order to train for a period of twenty-eight days per annum. Allowed to report at a time of their own choosing, it is perhaps not surprising that these volunteers – mostly fishermen – were to opt to train during the winter months when fishing work was minimal.**

**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.**

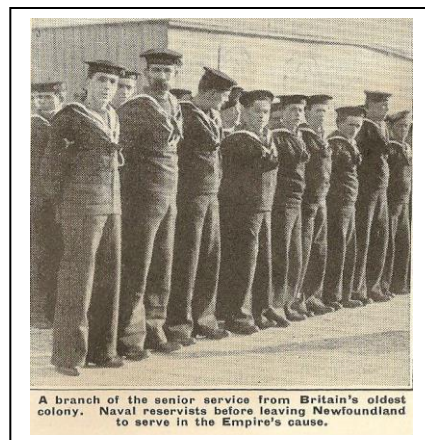
**(continued)**

**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: HMS ‘Calypso’ is seen here in full sail. The vessel was to be re-commissioned HMS ‘Briton’ in 1916 when a new ‘Calypso’, a modern cruiser, was launched by the Royal Navy. – The Royal Navy photograph dated 1898 is by courtesy of the Admiralty House Museum)**

**Only twenty-one days\* after having been...taken on strength...on HMS ‘Calypso’, his sparse Service Records document that it was on November 18, having by that time been promoted from the rank of Seaman Recruit, that the now-Seaman Truscott was on board ship on his way to the United Kingdom.**



**A branch of the senior service from Britain's oldest colony. Naval reservists before leaving Newfoundland to serve in the Empire's cause.**

**\*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 oft-times waived.**

**(Right above: Naval Reservists from Newfoundland at some time during the early days of the Great War, before their departure for the United Kingdom - from The War Illustrated)**

**He was one of a draft of one-hundred forty-nine naval reservists which embarked on November 18-19 onto the Allan Line ocean-liner Carthaginian which was apparently returning on its commercial route from Philadelphia(?) to Glasgow and thereupon took the draft on board. She sailed at nine o'clock in the evening of the 19<sup>th</sup>, its reservist passengers un-mentioned in the local newspapers.**



**(Right above: A relatively elderly vessel, ‘Carthaginian’ had been launched in October of 1884. She apparently remained un-requisitioned as a troop transport during the conflict although this did not prevent her from being sunk by a mine laid by a U-boat off the Irish coast on June 14 of 1917 – happily without any loss of life it may be added. – the un-dated photograph of Carthaginian entering St. John’s harbour has been donated to the Maritime History Archive web-site by Captain Harry Stone. )**

**Once having disembarked in the United Kingdom – in either Glasgow or Liverpool - it appears that while some few of the men were posted directly to a ship, the majority of the naval personnel was ordered directly to undergo further training at various Royal Navy**



establishments and thus, likely having journeyed by train, reported to these bases on or about November 28-29.

In the case of Seaman Truscott, the destination was to be HMS *Vivid 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 only a shore base during the Great War), Chatham, and Portsmouth for example, were terrestrial facilities 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.*

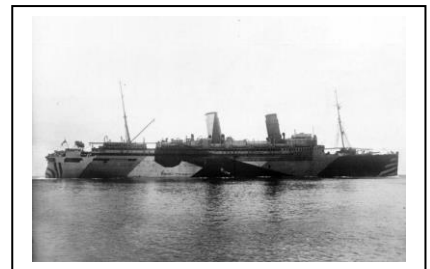
*HMS 'Vivid', the base to which Seaman Truscott had been ordered after his arrival in the United Kingdom from Newfoundland, was not only all the buildings and facilities on shore, but also a small, elderly, nondescript depot ship (originally HMS 'Cukoo', built 1873), to which all the naval personnel 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 where the seamen (as opposed to engine-room personnel, for example, who were sent to 'Vivid II') such as Seaman Truscott were initially stationed to await a posting to one of His Majesty's ships.*

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

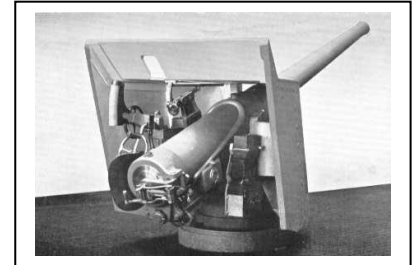
Seaman Truscott was to serve at *Vivid I* for the short period of perhaps some two weeks from the time of his arrival in the United Kingdom until December 4-5 when the summons to service came. He was thereupon transferred to an armed merchant cruiser.

*(Right: The SS 'Alsatian' had originally been built in 1913 for service with the 'Allan Line' but was to be requisitioned only a year afterwards in August of 1914 for war-time work with the Royal Navy as an armed merchant cruiser. She was thus converted to this end and armed with eight 4.7-inch guns (later replaced with 6-inch weapons) and two six-pounders for anti-aircraft use if the need arose. She was also apparently the first vessel of the Royal Navy to be camouflaged with 'dazzle painting' as seen here. – The photograph is from the [ww1sacrifice.com](http://ww1sacrifice.com) web-site.)*



Seaman Truscott, one of a draft of fifteen to arrive on December 5 from HMS *Vivid*, was to join the ship in Liverpool just following her arrival there from patrol and where she was undergoing – and would continue to do so until December 22 – coaling and loading of supplies and ammunition, and also the cleaning, painting and the necessary maintenance of the ship.

HMS *Alsatian* had been attached to the 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron, also known as the *Northern Patrol*, a force originally having comprised out-of-date warships which, by that January of 1915, had been replaced by requisitioned ocean-going passenger–cargo ships carrying a few elderly guns at times as old as some of the venerable ships on which they were mounted.



(Right above: *An example of the 4.7-inch naval gun with which Clan McNaughton had at first been equipped prior to sailing on her war-time duties. – from Wikipedia*)

The ships of the 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron were not spoiling – and certainly not prepared - for a fight. Their job was to form a part of the naval blockade designed to prevent ships carrying goods to Germany from reaching their destination; to accomplish this these vessels had to patrol the area of stormy waters encompassed by Ireland, northern Scotland, the Shetlands and Iceland, a thankless job at the best of times: during the tempestuous winter months, even worse.

*Alsatian* sailed from Liverpool three days before that Christmas of 1914, having cast off at twenty-five minutes past two on the afternoon of December 22.

Christmas Day was spent entering and leaving *Scapa Flow*, the home of the Royal Navy's Grand Fleet in the Shetland Islands, and there was also the distribution of the King and Queen's Christmas Cards to all the ship's company – by which time *Alsatian* was on her way out to sea once more.

Seaman Truscott's first patrol was to be of five weeks less a day in duration. In that time she was to encounter – and at times stop and search – twenty-nine vessels: six foreign vessels, eight British commercial ships and fifteen of the Royal Navy\*, some of them on several occasions.

*\*Three of them, 'Viknor', 'Clan McNaughton' and 'Bayano' were to later be lost with a number of Newfoundland seamen on board, 'Viknor' only two days following her chance meeting of January 11 with HMS 'Alsatian'.*

Seaman Truscott's ship docked again in Liverpool on January 25 to almost immediately begin coaling. There appears to be nor record of how many miles – the Royal Navy is *still* not metric – *Alsatian* had logged during her time at sea but that she was to take on some five-thousand tons of coal perhaps gives some idea – in the *Great War* the Royal Navy and the merchant fleet were only just beginning the conversion to oil.

She thereupon remained for twelve days in Liverpool before returning to her duties at sea.

Seaman Truscott was now to spend the next two years – all but eight days\* - in service on HMS *Alsatian*, performing the same sort of duties, both in port and out, as cited above.

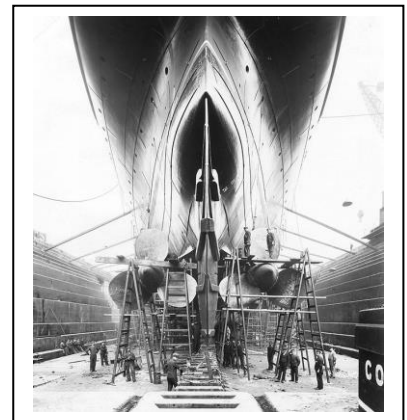
*\*These eight days, from March 22 until March 30 of 1915, were in a period when the ship was out at sea on patrol. Was it that he was in the sick bay during this time or a sailor of the boarding party which was placed on board a Norwegian ship to be brought into port on March 23? – There appears to be no further information a propos this void in Seaman Truscott's service record.*

Nor does there appear to be, during all the period of his work on HMS *Alsatian*, any incident other than the routines of the fifteen patrols at sea or the returns to Liverpool recorded in the ship's log-books. The only other land that Seaman Truscott was to see during this time was during two visits to the aforementioned *Scapa Flow* and the more frequent stops of a day or two at the isolated coaling-stations of *Swarbacks Minn* and *Busta Voe*, also in the Shetland Islands, visits which allowed the ships of the *Northern Patrol* to stay out at sea for longer periods than when they had been obliged to return to Liverpool.

On March 9 of 1917, Seaman Truscott and HMS *Alsatian* sailed into the port of Liverpool and, as ever, commenced coaling. But it also appears that the ship was about to undergo a major overhaul as the coaling was halted three days later so as to allow *Alsatian* to enter *Canada Dry Dock*\*.

*\*It would seem that 'Canada Dry Dock' was – and perhaps still is – only a single element of the entire complex known as 'Canada Dock'.*

The next several days were to be spent by the crew provisioning the ship, as well as cleaning, re-fitting and painting her, perhaps entirely if, as suggested, the dock had already been emptied of its water.

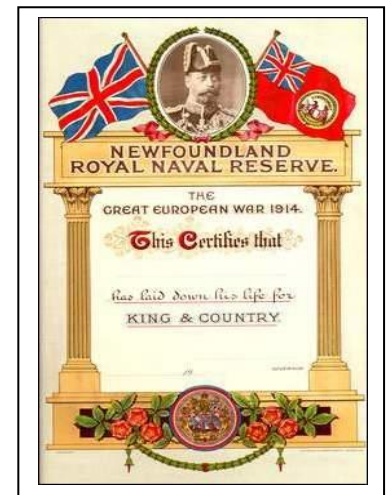


(Right above: *This is the SS Lusitania being worked on, the year likely 1907, in the Canada Dry Dock, Liverpool. – photograph from the Flickr web-site*)

A part of the entry of HMS *Alsatian*'s log-book for March 25, 1917, reads as follows: *6.30am: Reported by police that body of late Truscote (sic) AB RNR had been found in N° 1 Canada Dock\**.

*\*As noted above, 'Canada Dry Dock', is only a part of the 'Canada Dock' complex, much of which is 'wet dock'.*

(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 Elias (also found as *Ellis*) Truscott, former seaman reportedly deceased by the time of his son's enlistment (see below) - and perhaps as early as 1890, as he is not to be found in that year's Business Directory - and of Ellen Truscott (née *Stephenson\**) of New Gower Street, St. John's Newfoundland, it would appear that he was one of only two brothers: his sibling was Charles-Joseph (also see further below).



*\*The couple was married in St. Thomas' Anglican Church on January 20 of 1882, although later records (St. Patrick's Parish) suggest that both parents, at least later, adhered to the Roman Catholic persuasion.*

(Right above: *This family memorial, to be found in the Mount Carmel Roman Catholic Cemetery in St. John's, commemorates and honours the sacrifice of Seaman Truscott. – photograph from 2022, with thanks for same to my wife, Claire*)

Seaman Thomas Joseph Truscott was recorded as having...*accidentally drowned...*at the age of thirty-three years in the *Number 1 Canada Dock*. Liverpool, on March 24, 1917: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, January 29, 1886 (from his enlistment papers – but see immediately below)\*.

*\*However, two Truscott brothers are documented in Parish Records as follows: Thomas Charles Truscott born January 29, 1884; Charles Joseph Truscott born March 21, 1886, (both found in St. Patrick's Parish Records). It would seem - and there appears to have been only two children - that there is some confusion as to which one was Seaman Thomas Joseph.*

*Seaman Truscott 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 Thomas Joseph Truscott 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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 19, 2023.

