



Seaman Denis Tucker, Number 1326x, lies in the Scottish City of Dundee's Eastern Necropolis, Scotland, and shares his grave with Assistant Cook John Henry Gardiner, MMR, no service number listed, and with Able Seaman Stephen Thompson: Grave reference, N.N. 1762.

(continued)

Having relinquished his occupation in or about the city of St. John's, Denis Tucker *answered the call* of the naval authorities for volunteers and, on November 7 of 1914, he reported...*to duty*...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

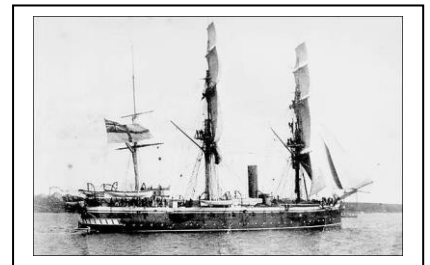
On that same November 7, Denis Tucker enlisted for the first time into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for a single year's* war-time service and underwent a satisfactory medical assessment on the same day. He also was likely to have attested at this time, pledging his allegiance 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.

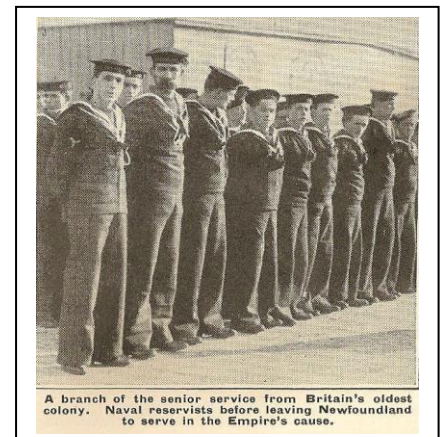
Just fewer than four-hundred men were sought to enroll as seamen – apparently automatically at the rank of Able Seaman - and to present themselves annually in St. John's for five years in order to train for a period of twenty-eight days per annum. Allowed to report at a time of their own choosing, it 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)



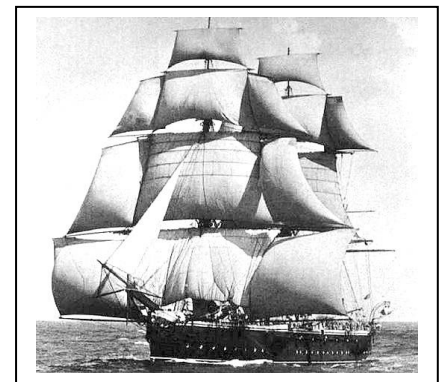
Expenses were apparently defrayed for the most part by the British (Imperial) Government and an attempt was made to ensure the number of recruits would be kept constantly at a maximum. This practice and policy was then to be continued up until the onset of hostilities some twelve years later.

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, 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.

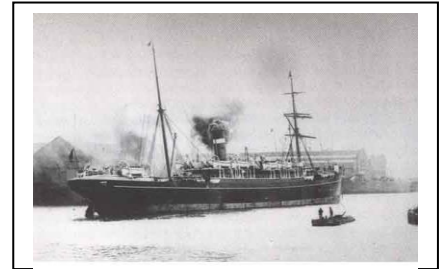


(Right above: HMS 'Calypso' in full sail. She was to be re-named 'Briton' in 1916 when a new 'Calypso', a modern cruiser, was about to be launched by the Royal Navy. – This

photograph, taken of her by the Royal Navy in 1898, is by courtesy of *Admiralty House Museum*)

Following forty days in St. John's of which twenty-eight had been required for training, Seaman Tucker, by that time recorded as promoted from the rank of *Seaman Recruit*, embarked on December 17 as one of a draft of one-hundred fifty three Naval Reservists onto the *Allan Line* ocean-liner *Mongolian* which sailed for the Scottish port-city of Glasgow at four o'clock on that same afternoon.

(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.*)



SS Mongolian

Once having disembarked in the United Kingdom it appears that several of the men were posted directly to a ship. Others were ordered to proceed to one of various Royal Navy establishments and thus, likely having journeyed by train, reported to these bases on or about December 28-29 – perhaps later since *Mongolian* could reportedly have made only twelve knots on her Atlantic crossing.

As seen above, Glasgow was to be where Seaman Tucker's draft set foot on shore, from where his destination was to be HMS *Vivid**, the Royal Navy port and facilities at 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 and a holding-barracks for seamen awaiting postings 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 Tucker 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: the holding barracks at 'Vivid I' was where the seamen (as opposed to engine-room personnel, for example, who were sent to 'Vivid II') such as Seaman Tucker were likely initially to be stationed – as well as potential signallers and telegraphers - while awaiting 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(?))

After a delay of ten weeks less two days at *Vivid* – this including the time spent traversing the Atlantic - Seaman Tucker was attached to HMS *Zaria*.



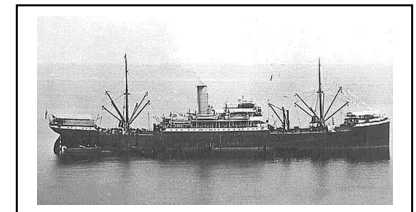
By the time of Seaman Tucker's attachment to her, the ship was stationed in the Auxiliary Patrol Base at Longhope in the Orkney Islands – in the vicinity of *Scapa Flow*, harbour of the British Grand Fleet.

The vessel had been launched at the end of the year 1903 for the *British and African Steam Navigation Company* of Liverpool. In the years prior to the Great War she had sailed on routes to and from the Canary Islands, West Africa and the West Indies but in Late 1914, with the onset of hostilities, she was requisitioned by the Admiralty on November 26 of 1914, converted for use as a Stores Carrier and Depot Ship, and commissioned as HMS *Zaria* on December 10 of that same year.

The Auxiliary Patrol Base at Longhope was a part of the effort to blockade Germany, to prevent ships from delivering goods and materials to that country through the inspection of any and all shipping to German or German-occupied ports. To this end, passenger and cargo vessels were requisitioned, armed and crewed by Royal Navy personnel with orders to stop, question, inspect and if necessary to board and seize vessels, be they enemy, neutral – or at times British – intercepted by the patrolling ships*.

**By 1917 the vessels of the 10th Cruiser Squadron had intercepted some thirteen-thousand ships.*

The bases from which these Auxiliary ships operated - and of course, other Royal Navy bases - became targets for the German reaction to their activities and were in their turn visited by surface vessels, submarines and mine-layers. To counter this, the British Admiralty hired, built and requisitioned smaller boats, often fishing-vessels, to patrol and to sweep for mines.



These smaller vessels, drifters, trawlers, yachts and the like were often placed under the control of larger ships such as *Zaria* whose task – amongst others – was to cater to the supply, administrative and personnel needs of the afore-mentioned smaller vessels.

(Right above: The photograph of a peace-time (?) Zaria is from the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Historical Society web-site.)

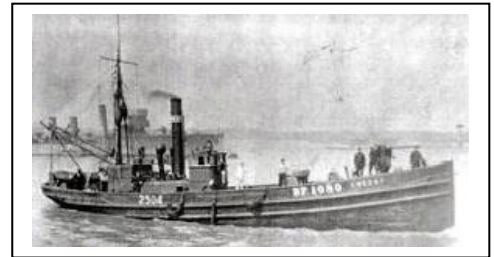
Thus, while Seaman Tucker was indeed transferred to HMS *Zaria*, it is not certain that he ever set foot on her deck. However, he was to serve in three of those minor vessels, two drifters and a trawler which were, as seen above, *Zaria's* responsibility.

The first of these three was *likely* the drifter *Ocean Gleaner* – the records are difficult to interpret. Built in 1913, she was a hired drifter, Admiralty number 2012, from the Scottish coastal town of Banff, and was of just eighty-six tons weight. Before coming into service as a *net vessel* – inspection of anti-submarine nets(?) – and minesweeper in January of 1915, she had been armed with a single quick-firing three-pounder gun. *Ocean Gleaner* survived the conflict and remained in service, minesweeping until 1920, before reverting to fishing.



(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)*

(Right: *The Royal Navy Drifter 'Cheery' which was to survive the conflict and of the same class as 'Ocean Gleaner', the photograph showing a small gun mounted on her fore-deck – photograph from Wikipedia)*



(Right: *A photographic example of the type of aforementioned 3-pounder gun as mounted on Ocean Gleaner – from Wikipedia)*



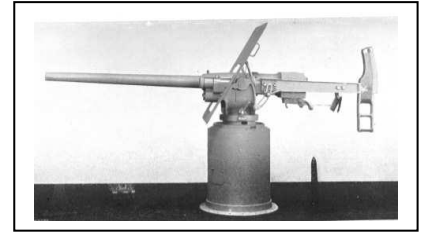
Seaman Tucker joined his new ship on February 23 of 1915 and was to remain with her for some six months, a period which was devoid of any activity other than the vessel's routine duties.

That time having passed, on August 20 Seaman Tucker was *taken on strength* of the trawler *Bermuda* which had also been hired for the purpose of minesweeping. Larger than a drifter, trawlers were perhaps better suited for work further off-shore where the weather in those northern climes was seldom clement. Built in 1905 and from the North Sea fishing-town of Grimsby, she weighed two-hundred eleven tons and was armed with a six-pounder weapon. *Bermuda* had entered into war-time service in December of 1914.



(Right: *Royal Navy armed trawlers in the port of Dover during the Great War – from the Imperial War Museum web-site...iwm.org.uk..)*

(Right below: A Quick-Firing Hotchkiss six-pounder gun such as would had been mounted on the fore-deck of His Majesty's Trawler 'Bermuda' – from Wikipedia)



Seaman Tucker was to remain in service on HMT *Bermuda*, apparently again without incident*, until the final day of that year, 1915.

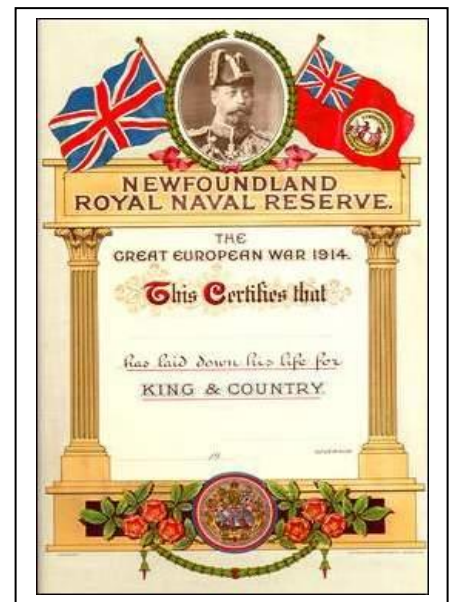
**While all vessels serving in the Royal Navy are required to maintain log-books to record the daily happenings pertaining to the ship – and some, of course, have been lost with the vessel if she were lost at sea – not all of them are yet available for public perusal on the Internet. The naval-history.net website is still labouring at this daunting task and is appending them as they are completed – for this and for the work already completed, the organization is to be commended.*

Thus – Alas! – no log-book is available for any of the four vessels which were to figure in Seaman Tucker's all-too brief naval career.

On the first day of the New Year, 1916, Seaman Tucker was transferred to yet another ship, although he was still to remain under the overall watchful eye of HMS *Zaria*. His new assignment was to be on board another hired trawler, an older vessel – built in 1896 – also from Grimsby and armed with a three-pounder gun, but forty-eight tons lighter than the trawler *Bermuda*.

His Majesty's Trawler *Dover* was to ultimately serve from October of 1914 up until December of 1918.

Why HMT *Dover* was in the *Victoria Dock Basin* in Dundee at the end of the month of August of 1916 appears not to have been documented among the papers available, possibly just for some routine maintenance; nor are the complete circumstances of the accident recorded therein. In fact, the information given is contradictory: his scant personal service record states...*Accidentally drowned in Victoria Basin, Dundee, whilst attempting to get on board his ship*; however, a copy of Royal Navy casualty records cites his death thus...*TUCKER, Denis, Seaman, Newfoundland RNR, X 1326, (ship) Dover, 26 August 1916, illness.*



The son of William Tucker, variously found as farmer, fisherman and labourer, and of Mary Ann Tucker (née *Woodrow**) of Thorburn Road and Broad Cove in St. John's West, he was also brother to Joseph-Michael, Bernard, Johannah, Mary-Joseph and to Catherine.

**The couple was married in St. John's on October 10 of 1889.*

Seaman Denis Joseph Tucker is recorded as having died on that August 26, 1916, at the reported age of twenty-four years*: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, October 15,

1890 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register and Roman Catholic Parish Records), although his enlistment papers document it as having been September 15, 1892.

**The Newfoundland Death Register has the day of his death as August 27, a day later than elsewhere.*

(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 Tucker 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 Denis Joseph Tucker was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, 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.