



Seaman Edgar Hoskins, Number 1745x, lies in a communal grave in the Anfield Cemetery of the City of Liverpool where his name is recorded on the Screen Wall (South) placed there by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Having decided to *answer the call* of the naval authorities for volunteers, and having relinquished his occupation as a fisherman, he thereupon travelled from the community of Greenspond in the District of Bonavista to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on April 13 of 1915, Edgar Hoskins reported...*to duty*...on the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).



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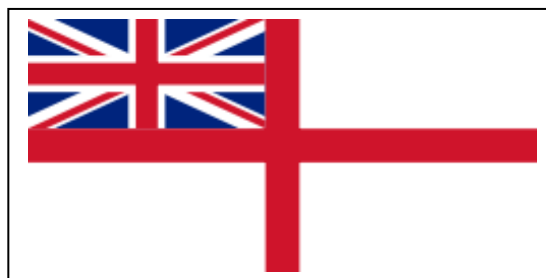
On that same April 13 he enlisted for the first time into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for a single year's war-time service* and underwent a satisfactory medical assessment on the same day. He also likely attested at this time, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George 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.

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)

Six weeks and four days after having first reported to Calypso in St. John's, on May 29-30 Seaman Hoskins was apparently promoted from the rank of Seaman Recruit to that of Seaman; his sparse Service Records also report that this was to be the date on which he was to depart from St. John's to cross the Atlantic.

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However, the Discharge Register of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) suggests that Seaman Edgar Hoskins was to board the armed merchant cruiser HMS *Calgarian* in St. John's Harbour as one of a draft of eighty-five reservists, on the twentieth day of that June* - it was the seventeenth - and in the company of the two-hundred forty-two men and officers of 'F' Company of the Newfoundland Regiment on its way to Scotland.

(Right: The photograph of Newfoundland military personnel in tenders on their way to board 'Calgarian' is from the Provincial Archives. 'Calgarian' was not a requisitioned troop transport but in September of 1914 had been taken over by the British government to serve as an armed merchant-cruiser. She did, however, as on this occasion, at times carry troops and civilian passengers across the Atlantic. She was later torpedoed and sunk by U-19 off the north of Ireland on March 1, 1918.)



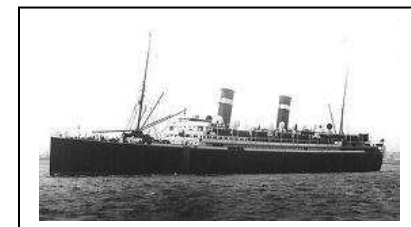
**Apparently the ship took nineteen days to make what was usually the journey of about a week. Not only was 'Calgarian' escorting four submarines, but she sailed by way of the Portuguese Azores and then Gibraltar – some of the Newfoundlanders apparently even having the time to cross the straits to spend a few hours in North Africa. She reached Liverpool on July 9.*



(Right above: The British Crown Colony of Gibraltar in pre-Great War days: The Spanish mainland is in the background beyond the harbour and Royal Navy dockyard. – from a vintage postcard)

HMS *Calgarian* and her trans-Atlantic crossing of June 20 to July 9, 1915...

The armed merchant cruiser HMS 'Calgarian' arrived in St. John's Harbour from Halifax at about six o'clock in the morning of June 17, anchored and almost immediately began coaling. Her log suggests that she had sailed alone rather than in the company of the submarines (see below) since at times 'Calgarian' had been doing sixteen knots and the submarines' top speed was only thirteen.



(Right above: The photograph of the SS 'Calgarian' is from the naval-history.net web-site.)

At about five-fifteen of that same evening of June 17 the personnel of 'F' Company of the Newfoundland Regiment came on board as well as eighty-seven naval reservists and a single petty officer.

June 18 was to be spent transferring stores to HMS 'Calgarian' and completing the coaling of the ship. On this day is first mentioned the SS 'Glenalmond', a smaller cargo ship which was to accompany 'Calgarian' across the Atlantic to Gibraltar, the vessel from which some of the above-mentioned stores were to be drawn, and on which a small detachment of eight naval reservists and some few more senior ranks were to travel.

Also noted for the first time in the log of that June 18 was one – the vessel H2 - of the apparently four submarines – ‘H1’, ‘H2’, ‘H3’ and ‘H4’ - which were to be escorted across the ocean. They had presumably already made the journey from Montreal where they had been built to St. John’s where they had been awaiting ‘Calgarian’. Where exactly the SS ‘Glenalmond’ fits into the picture is not clear unless she was the submarines’ depot ship or acting as an ocean-going tug.

Calgarian sailed out of St. John’s Harbour at ten minutes past ten on the morning of June 20, 1915, at a speed of ten – then lowered to eight – knots. This had surely been to allow the submarines, otherwise un-mentioned, to keep pace with the larger vessel.

Proceeding at a reduced rate of speed, often about eight and a half knots, it was not until the afternoon of June 26 that the small convoy of HMS ‘Calgarian’, SS ‘Glenalmond’ and the four small submarines reached ‘Flores Island’ in the Portuguese Azores. During those days ‘Calgarian’ had been towing Submarine ‘H3’, at times its crew being required to repair a ruptured or slipped towline.

The remainder of the afternoon and early evening was spent anchored off ‘Flores Island’ with the submarines in turn drawing alongside to take on fuel (diesel oil) and supplies. It was a task soon accomplished and – after ‘H3’s towing-line had once more been repaired – the ships were on their way again at a speed of nine knots just after ten o’clock on that same evening of June 26.



(Right above: ‘Delgado Point’ on ‘Flores Island’, close to where the convoy anchored, and then past which it sailed on June 26, 1915 – photograph the cruisemapper.com)

It was not to be until the late morning of July 3 that they arrived at the British possession of Gibraltar situated at the narrow entrance to the Mediterranean Sea. This was to be where HMS ‘Calgarian’ would part ways with ‘Glenalmond’ – her eight naval reservists and five higher ranks to transfer immediately to ‘Calgarian’*.

***The four submarines were now to enter the Mediterranean Sea and proceed to the island of Malta from where they were to operate for the remainder of the Great War – except for H3 which would strike a mine a year later, on July 15, 1916, and be lost with all on board.**



(Right: The photograph of ‘H4’ in Brindisi Harbour in August of 1916 is from Wikipedia.)

Two days only were spent in Gibraltar although a number of those on board were able to leave the ship for ‘liberty’ on July 4. On July 5, having taken on board coal, supplies and a number of German prisoners-of-war, the ship sailed at eight o’clock in the evening and for

the first time in some two weeks was able to proceed at a speed greater than ten knots. She was now en route to Liverpool.

There she arrived without incident of July 9 and at ten minutes past eight of the following morning, HMS Calgarian's record-keeper documented... "Clypso" (sic) Boys left ship.

(The above has been adapted from the log-book of the armed merchant cruiser HMS 'Calgarian' for the period of June 13, 1915, to July 9, 1915.)

On July 10 of that 1916, *Calgarian* having docked in Liverpool, the Naval Reserve personnel would thereupon have been either posted directly to a ship or ordered to undergo further training – or to simply wait - at one of various Royal Navy establishments – these for the most part operating around the coast of England.

In the case of Seaman Hoskins, not immediately attached to a vessel, *HMS Victory I* (see below) was the posting to which he was directed and where he was to remain until November 22 of that same year – although exactly what his occupations were to be during this period of wearing a cap-band emblazoned *HMS Victory* is not clear.

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 not only in training but awaiting a posting to one of His Majesty's ships, its facilities initially set in the naval city and port of Portsmouth; thirdly, 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.

**The large influx of personnel due to the War necessitated further Divisions and functions being transferred to other areas of the United Kingdom.*

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



***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, obsolescent and obscure vessel – HMS 'Victory' was the exception - was used for this purely bureaucratic purpose.*

After about a week of serving at *Victory I*, on July 17-18 Seaman Hoskins was transferred to nearby *Whale Island* from where on a fine day Portsmouth Harbour is visible.

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****HMS 'Excellent' was the name – and also still is the name - of the Royal Navy's Gunnery School which had been established in a ship of the same name in 1829, the vessel being permanently moored just outside Portsmouth dockyard. As the years passed the ships were to be replaced, but each in turn was to be named HMS 'Excellent'.***



(Right adjacent: Drill on a naval gun on 'Whale Island' during the period of the Great War – from Wikipedia)

And as the years passed, the use evolved of the nearby 'Whale (originally 'Whaley') Island' as facilities were constructed on it. In 1885 the Gunnery School was moved from the ship of the time to be re-established on the island itself.



(Right: The Royal Navy Memorial stands on the coast at Portsmouth from where may be seen 'Whale Island' – photograph from 1917)

Which is why Seaman Hoskins would next have worn an HMS 'Excellent' cap-band.

After two months and two days of learning how the Royal Navy's armaments worked, Seaman Hoskins was once again placed on the books of HMS *Victory I* although for how long - or even *if* he were to remain in Portsmouth – appears not to have been recorded.

On an unspecified date he was ordered to the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool. While his own service file appears not to document the reason for this transfer, the record of his death suggests that he might have been destined to join a merchant ship – and, given his recent training at HMS *Excellent*, it may well have been as a gunner to serve the single gun with which the ship had been equipped that he had been dispatched to Liverpool from Portsmouth.

The ship in question, *Abosso*, appears to have run almost exclusive between southern Africa and Great Britain during the first years of the conflict.



There appears to be no record of his movements at this time but it may be that Seaman Hoskins was go on board the ship at some occasion – there perhaps to be bitten by a mosquito.

(Right above: A vessel of just less than eight-thousand tons, the 'Abosso' had been completed in the year 1912 for the 'Elder Dempster Line' and, as seen above, was to serve on the Canary Islands and West Africa routes to Great Britain. She continued her commercial work until April 24 of 1917 when she was torpedoed and sunk by U-43 with a loss of sixty-five lives. – the undated photograph is from Wikipedia)

The son of John Hoskins, former fisherman, deceased of meningitis on May 18, 1905, and of Merab (*sic*, but also found as Miriam, Marian and Mirion) Hoskins (née *Rogers) of Ship**

Island, Bonavista Bay, he was also brother to Sophia, William, Alexander, Pierce, Jane, Blanche, Julia and to Violet.

**The couple had been married in the Parish of Greenspond on November 11, 1881.*

(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)

Having been hospitalized in the Royal Infirmary in Liverpool, Seaman Hoskins was reported as having...*died of disease, malaria...*on October 20 of 1915 at the recorded age of twenty-two years: date of birth in Greenspond, Newfoundland, November 12, 1893 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register and Royal Navy *Death* Records). At the time of his passing he was still attached to HMS *Victory I*.

Seaman Hoskins 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 Edgar Hoskins was entitled to the British War Medal for his overseas service, never having sailed on active service.

Note: The web-site...First World War – On This Day...from <https://www.cwgc.org/> or <https://livesofthefirstworldwar...>cite Lincolnshire LINCOLN (CANWICK ROAD) CEMETERY as being his last resting place.

However the primary web-site of the CWGC (Commonwealth War Graves Commission) confirms Liverpool as the site of his burial; nor is Seaman Hoskins named among the military dead of Canwick Road Cemetery.



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 21, 2023.