

BLUNDON, A.



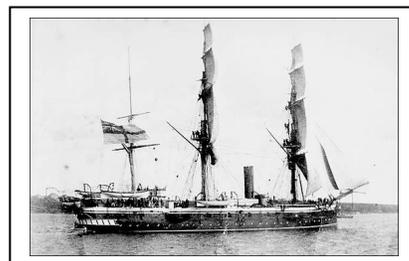
(Acting) Le found as 1496x, havi place but t on a bron the Newfou Beaumont-l Having dec the naval a he relinqui fisherman from the to District of John's*, ca of Newf December reported... Reserve tra moored in the harbour (see below).

On that same December 17 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 successfully underwent the required medical assessment on the morrow. He also likely attested at this time, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V.

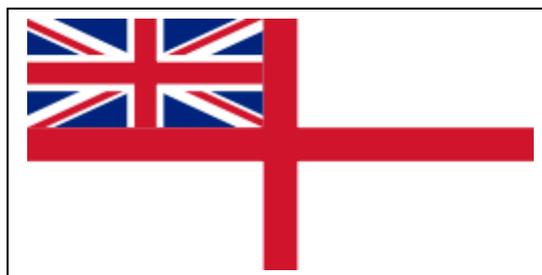
(Right: George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India: as a boy and young man he had served in the Royal Navy from 1877 until 1891 and always retained a fondness for the Senior 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.

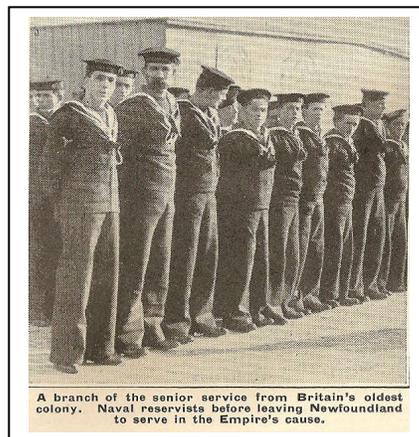
Just fewer than four-hundred men were sought to enroll as seamen – apparently automatically at the rank of Able Seaman - and to present themselves annually in St. John’s for five years in order to train for a period of twenty-eight days per annum. Allowed to report at a time of their own choosing, it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



(Right above: 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)

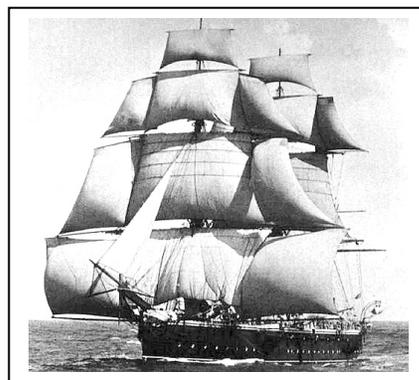
Expenses were apparently defrayed for the most part by the British (Imperial) Government and an attempt was made to ensure the number of recruits would be kept constantly at a maximum. This practice and policy was then to be continued up until the onset of hostilities some twelve years later.

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)

Four weeks less three days after having first reported to *Calypso* in St. John's, on January 11 he was apparently promoted from the rank of Seaman Recruit to that of Seaman; some three weeks later again, on February 4 of that 1915, the records suggest that Seaman Blundon was to depart from St. John's to cross the Atlantic.

In fact, it appears to have been a little more complicated than that.

On that February 4, 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, had 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 the documents of some Reservists, also citing February 4, might suggest that they were to be a part of that contingent.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *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.*)

Other available sources do not, however, record any Newfoundland naval reservists having taken passage on *Dominion*. In fact, *Calypso's* drill register of the time records that the naval draft, including Seaman Blundon, was 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 become even a bit more convoluted: Days before, according to the local newspapers, on that above-mentioned February 4-5, *Mongolian* had left St. John's in an 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 was to return to port.

In re-entering St. John's Harbour, however, the vessel had 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, but not the Reservists, 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 McDonnell 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.

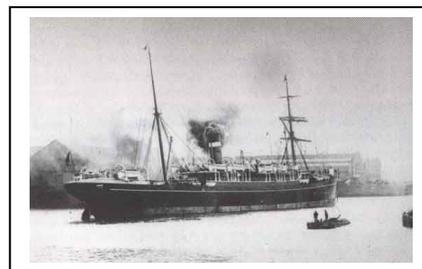
I would request, Sir, that you would be good enough to forward to His Excellency the Governor my appreciation for the assistance so ably rendered by him. I would also ask you to place on record my high opinion of Petty Officer George Gill and Armourer Luxon.

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 the letter further above) - in the United Kingdom in early March, the Newfoundland Naval personnel would 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 Blundon, the destination was to be HMS *Vivid I* at Plymouth-Devonport on the English south coast.

HMS *Vivid I* was a base and barracks for regular seamen and it was therefore *Vivid I* to which Seaman Blundon was to be attached.

***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 Blundon 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: as has already been seen, 'Vivid I' was where the seamen (as opposed to the engine-room personnel, for example, in 'Vivid II') such as Seaman Blundon were to be stationed.

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



Seaman Blundon was to serve one-hundred thirty-two days at Vivid I. During this period, on April 19 he was seconded to another Division, Trawler Reserve, and was thereupon to spend fifty-nine days in that Section as a deck-hand, although there is no record of him setting foot on the deck of any ship during this time.

That was then to change: on June 17-18 he was transferred to the nominal roll of HMS Columbine, an elderly sloop by the name of Wild Swan which had been re-named Columbine in order to become the harbour-service and base-ship for the Royal Navy harbour and dock at Rosyth.

The Rosyth complex being situated in the Firth of Forth almost opposite the city of Edinburgh, Deck Hand Blundon was therefore soon to be travelling northwards from southern England to Scotland.

It is not clear from the scant records available whether Deck Hand Blundon was to serve on the ship HMS Columbine or at the shore-based facilities for which she was responsible and that were known by the same name.

The records show that during this period, likely as of October 1, 1915 until March 16 of the following year, that Deck Hand Blundon was to serve on board a vessel named Chester.

The fact that there were two ships of that name – although one of them had recently been re-commissioned as *Chester II* – complicates matters for this dossier.

*Chester II** (re-named as such from *Chester* in May of 1915) was a hired trawler** - and Deck Hand Blundon was a sailor of the *Trawler Reserve*. A ten year-old ship of some one-hundred-forty tons she had been requisitioned by the Admiralty, re-fitted and armed with a single three-pounder quick-firing gun, and come into service as a mine-sweeper in October of 1914. It may well be that her war-time career was to be in the area of Rosyth as that is where it came to an end on February 29 of 1916 when she was sunk in a collision in the Firth of Forth, an accident in which her crew incurred no fatalities.

**Trawlers in His Majesty's service were habitually known as HMT (His Majesty's Trawler) rather than HMS (His Majesty's Ship) but apparently the trawler Chester was at times identified as HMS – and in Seaman Blundon's papers she is identified as neither – all of which adds to the obscurity.*

***During the War, 1456 trawlers were requisitioned from ports around the British Isles and even elsewhere of which two-hundred sixty-four were to be lost.*

Only days after this incident, Deck Hand Blundon was transferred back to *Vivid III*, the Royal Naval Division Trawler Section, and was likely on his way back to England.

However, it may not be impossible that he was to be briefly attached to the light cruiser *HMS Chester*. The vessel, originally ordered by the Greek government but bought during her construction by the British Admiralty was launched in December of 1915 in the town and port of Birkenhead – but then disappears from the available records for the next number of months, until May of 1916 when she is reported as having been commissioned as part of Admiral Beatty's fleet at Rosyth.

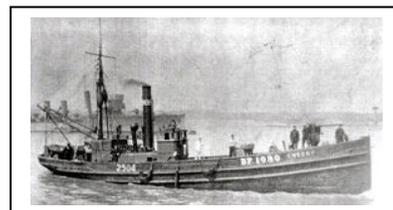
But when it was that *HMS Chester* the cruiser had first arrived at Rosyth is not at all clear. Had it been immediately after her launching for further work and for later sea-trials – no dates or information seem to be readily available - then perhaps Deck Hand Blundon found himself temporarily a member of her crew.

From March 17 until April 4 it seems as though Deck Hand Blundon was awaiting a summons to further service, a call which came on that second date to a hired yacht *Sabrina* which had only recently been named *Sabrina II*.

Having been built in 1899, *Sabrina* had been requisitioned early in the *Great War* and armed with a single twelve-pounder gun and also one six-pounder quick-firing weapon. She carried wireless – not all that common at the time – for which reason she may have been an Auxiliary Patrol Leader, responsible for a flotilla of smaller vessels, usually requisitioned fishing-boats.

While *Sabrina II* was indeed a ship, she was also the parent-ship or depot-ship at the Royal Navy complex at Milford Haven, Wales, where Deck Hand Blundon was now to serve, whether physically on board *Sabrina II* or otherwise.

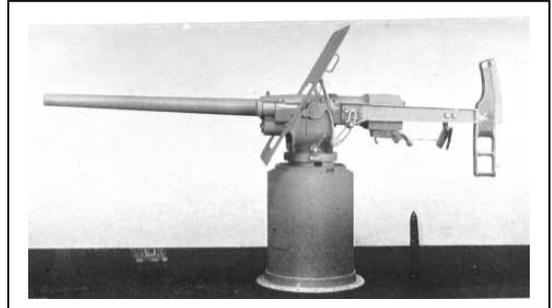
But he *would* eventually serve on one of the afore-mentioned



smaller vessels, a wooden fishing-drifter by the name of *Verdant*.

Small wooden vessels were more than suitable for mine-sweeping as they were manoeuvrable, usually had a good view of the surrounds and proved to be less vulnerable to the magnetic mines which were introduced later during the *War*.

Verdant was such a one. A wooden, ninety-ton craft built in 1906 and before the *Great War* which had worked out of the Scottish port of Banff. She had been armed with a single six-pounder quick-firing gun and had commenced her war-time service as a net-vessel and mine-sweeper in September of 1915.



(Preceding page: *The Royal Navy Drifter 'Cheery' - she was to survive the conflict - of the same class as 'Verdant', here showing a gun mounted on her fore-deck – photograph from Wikipedia*)

(Right above: *A Quick-Firing Hotchkiss six-pounder gun such as would had been mounted on the fore-deck of the drifter Verdant – from Wikipedia*)

Some four months after Deck Hand Blundon's arrival at Milford Haven, the authorities decided to introduce another parent-ship, and thus another designation, to the Milford Haven establishment. The new arrival was another hired yacht, *Idaho*, and thus the base evolved from *HMS Sabrina II* and became *HMS Idaho*.

These changes likely were to make little difference to the daily tasks, duties and routines of Deck Hand Blundon and he was to remain for a further seventeen weeks less two days, apparently uneventful, in Wales, until January 11 of 1917.

Then there was a return journey to *HMS Vivid* although on this case it was to *Vivid III*, again the *Naval Trawler Reserve Section*, that Deck Hand Blundon was transferred to serve from January 12 to February 15. And on some unrecorded date while there he reverted back to the rank of seaman.

Forty-three days at *Vivid I* and a further twenty-five once again at *Vivid III* were then to follow before Seaman Blundon was then dispatched back to Milford Haven for a further seven-week posting at *HMS Idaho*. However, once more there appears to be no record of in what activities he may have been employed and, at the end of this period, on June 14, he found himself in familiar surroundings: *Vivid III*.

It may have been noticed that the subject of this dossier was introduced as Leading Seaman Blundon. This rank is confirmed in several sources yet in his scant Service Record no promotion appears to have been documented.

From *Vivid III* after a forty-seven days' delay (*Acting*) Leading Seaman Blundon was on his way to *President III*, if only perhaps on paper. This Royal Navy establishment had initially been in London where the original – floating – *President* had been opened to serve as a drill-ship for recruits of the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve. *President III*, one of several

Divisions to emerge as the War progressed, was to deal primarily with finances and accountancy, its offices at times located outside the capital city. However, it is unlikely that (*Acting*) Leading Seaman Blundon was to become involved with the finances of the Royal Navy and it may be that neither was he to see anything of London as it is not impossible that from *Vivid III* he was very soon to report, perhaps even directly, to his next ship.

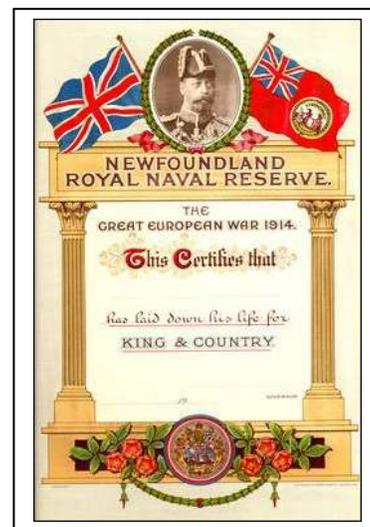
Heatherside was a three-thousand ton collier chartered by the Admiralty and on this occasion she was to carry a cargo of coal from the Welsh port of Newport via Milford Haven to the British Mediterranean island possession of Malta.

The date of the ship's departure from Newport, because of her halt at Milford Haven, must surely have been in or about mid-August and by August 25 the vessel had reached the southern reaches of the Bay of Biscay and the coastal area of Cape Ortegal in north-west Spain.

It was there and then* that the vessel encountered the German submarine U-boat 93 which torpedoed and sank her victim with a loss of twenty-seven lives.

**Other sources have August 24 – August 25 is from a copy of Royal Navy records.*

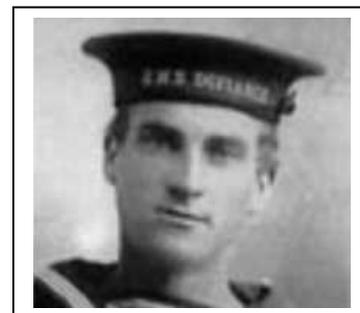
(Right: A Memorial Scroll, a copy of which was distributed to the families of those who had sacrificed their life while in the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve)



The son of William Blundon, former fisherman, possibly deceased *possibly* of consumption October 14, 1902, and of Mary Ann Blundon (née *Riggs**, possibly deceased of consumption on July 28, 1898), he was also brother to Katherine, Herbert (named as his next-of-kin) and likely to Sarah.

**The couple was married in the community of Bay de Verde on May 21 of 1887.*

(Right: The photograph is from *Ancestry.ca* to which it has been donated by Marion Hynes-Stovall. It purports to be of Allan (sic) Blundon but what little of the cap-band that may be read does not refer to any ship on which Seaman Blundon is recorded as having served* – but which may not be relevant.)



**Is it HMS 'Excellent', the Royal Navy Gunnery School, where he is not recorded as having been posted.*

Leading Seaman Blundon is recorded as having died on August 24-25, 1917, in the sinking of the collier *Heatherside* at the reported age of twenty-one years: date of birth in Bay de Verde, Newfoundland, October 12, 1894 (from his enlistment papers) but the year also found as 1896 in the caption of the above photograph. (His presumed sister Sarah, however, is recorded as born on May 28, 1896.)

(continued)

Leading Seaman Blundon 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.

Leading Seaman Allen Blundon 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 22, 2023.

