



Seaman Frederick James Butt, Number 1592x, is buried in St. James' Cemetery, Dover: Grave reference, N.W. 23.. His remains lie with those of two fellow Newfoundlanders, both seamen: James C. Clarke and Ronald Chaulk whose stories are to be found elsewhere in these files.

(continued)

Having decided to answer the call of the naval authorities for volunteers and having relinquished his occupation in the community of Freshwater, Conception Bay, he thereupon travelled from there to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on January 25 of 1915, Frederick James Butt reported...*to duty...on the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS Calypso, moored in the harbour (see below).*

On that same January 25 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 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.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *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 by the Royal Navy in 1898 is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)*

Apparently a mere ten days* after having first reported to *Calypso* in St. John's, on February 4 Seaman Butt was promoted from the rank of Seaman Recruit to that of Seaman; thereupon, on the same February 4 of that 1915, the records suggest that he was to depart from St. John's to cross the Atlantic.

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.



**The 'requisite' twenty-eight days of training was per times waived, sometimes partially but on other occasions entirely, even in the seaman in question had undergone no previous such experience.*

(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 draft personnel 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 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 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.

(continued)

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.)



SS Mongolian

Once having disembarked from *Scandinavian* - on which they had journeyed from Halifax (see in the letter found above) - in the United Kingdom in early March, any 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 Butt, the destination was to be the Royal Navy's gunnery school, HMS *Excellent*, on *Whale Island* facing the entrance to the harbour of Portsmouth on England's south coast.

***HMS 'Excellent' was 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: Recruits at drill on a naval gun on 'Whale Island' at some time during the Great War – from Wikipedia)

And also 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.

It was a move which was to complicate things administratively.

Naval discipline being distinct in some ways from the laws that governed other parties such as the Army and civilians, sailors had to be on the books of a serving naval vessel to be legally subject to naval law and order, even when these sailors were serving on land at a 'stone-frigate', as these land-based facilities came to be known.

Thus the use of elderly and obsolescent vessels that plied the waters adjacent to the many naval land establishments were in theory the home ships of the tens, hundreds, even thousands of men who laboured ashore in naval uniform – and who often were never to set foot on the ship in question.

(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 Butt would have then worn an HMS 'Excellent' cap-band.

Seaman Butt was to remain for ten weeks less three days at HMS *Excellent* before being transferred on April 13 of that same year across the way to *Victory II* – there were at least nine different Divisions of *Victory* – although not every source appears to agree where exactly *Victory II* was or what its function was.

It is certain that *Victory II* amongst other things was a training establishment for stokers – most of the Royal Navy's ships were at the time powered by coal, with oil only becoming more common as the *Great War* progressed – and for those others who were to work in the ships' engine room*. But apparently *Victory II* also looked after the financial accounting for the numerous ships that were based in Portsmouth and may also have been responsible for the training of a Royal Navy Division – sailors who had no ship or who were otherwise superfluous to needs were often ordered to serve as infantry in one of the eventual twelve battalions of the Royal Navy Division.

**All of these men were already trained seamen.*

And at some time during 1915 at least some of the activities of *Victory II* were transferred to London to the area of Crystal Palace where it remained until the end of the conflict. However, a number of sources persist in saying that stokers and engine-room personnel continued at least partially to be trained at Portsmouth...

...and this may well have been the lot of Seaman-Gunner Butt for three weeks, from April 14 to May 5 on which latter date he was dispatched to the shore base known as HMS *Attentive* to be taken onto its strength on the morrow, May 6.

The coastal town of Dover lies on that part of the English coast which lies closest to France and the port-town of Calais. The Dover Straits, some thirty kilometres wide, allow vessels from the Baltic sea, from northern Europe and from the North Sea to have access to the English Channel – or La Manche as the French call it – and from there the Atlantic Ocean. Today it is the world's second busiest waterway – and it was already critical to British interests at the time of the Great War.

Even some seventy years prior to that conflict the British had seen fit in the mid-nineteenth century to construct a harbour for commercial, for cross-Channel and for naval reasons. The port of Dover today is the main maritime link between the United Kingdom and the continent – and the more recently-constructed 'Chunnel' (Channel Tunnel) passes almost directly underneath it.

(Right: One of the entrances to the port of Dover as seen from the Dover Straits with, flanking it to the right, the well-known White Cliffs – photograph from 2010)



With the Germans having occupied a part of the Belgian coast just to the north-east of Dover and with a goodly number of British vessels, both commercial and naval – to which should be added the troop transports which from Dover and from nearby Folkestone were, by the end of the War, to have carried some five million troops across to the Western Front – using the aforementioned waterway, the British created the ‘Dover Patrol’

The biggest fear was that the Germans would employ U-boats and torpedo-boats based on the Belgian coast to attack British shipping, and would also set mines in those waters. In fact they did it all, although it was the mines that were to become the greatest threat to shipping.

Thus began the ‘Dover Patrol’. In its early days it was a motley collection of old, even obsolete war-ships, for the most part destroyers, to which was very soon to be added a number of requisitioned and purpose-built small vessels, notably fishing-boats, trawlers and drifters, lightly armed but capable of mine-sweeping and keeping their German opposite numbers at bay.



(Right above: Armed trawlers of the ‘Dover Patrol’ in the harbour at Dover – The undated photograph is from the Imperial War Museum web-site.)

The ‘Dover Patrol’ rapidly became a large and important entity of Britain’s naval defences and vessels from it were to be stationed not only at Dover but at other points around the nearby coast*.

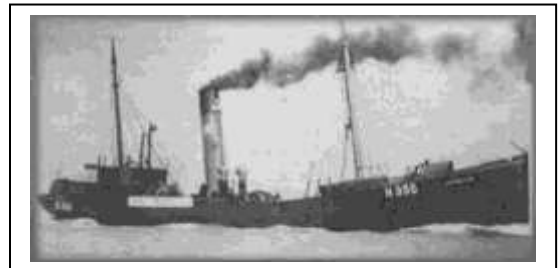
***HMS Ceto was the facility at nearby Ramsgate where several Newfoundlanders serving in ships of the Dover Patrol were based.**

The port at Dover and its naval presence there thus became HMS *Attentive* to which Seaman-Gunner Butt was to be attached in that May of 1915.

When exactly it was that Seaman-Gunner Butt first set foot on the deck of a ship of the *Dover Patrol* appears not to have been recorded.

But when he did it was onto the *Othello II* that he stepped. She was a requisitioned (Admiralty Number 1193) hired trawler* of some two-hundred tons having been built in 1907 and registered in the east-coast fishing-port of Hull as H.956. Converted for war-time use she was armed with a single six-pounder gun and came into service in March, 1915.

(Right above: The image of a peace-time ‘*Othello II*’ is from the coastalheritage.org.uk web-site via Google.)



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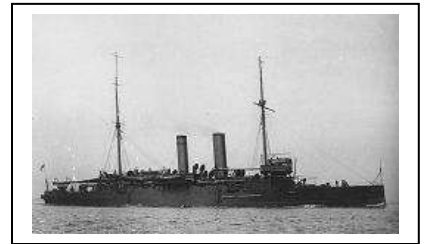
(Preceding page: *A Quick-Firing Hotchkiss six-pounder gun such as would have been mounted on the fore-deck of the trawler 'Othello II' – from Wikipedia*)

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

Apparently this first posting to *Othello II* was to pass without any untoward incident for on June 30 of that 1915 Seaman Gunner Butt was transferred to serve for only a week, from July 1 until July 7 on board the naval vessel *St. George*. The problem for the historian is that at the time there were two vessels of that name employed in the service of His Majesty.

One was an ex-1st class cruiser of the *Edgar Class* built in 1892, a ship of almost eight-thousand tons armed with four six-inch and eight twelve-pounder guns. She had soon become obsolete and by 1910 had been converted for use as a depot ship.

By the spring of 1915 she was being used as such by the *Humber Patrol* of mainly smaller craft and was tied up in the port of Immingham in north-east England where she was preparing to play the same role in the eastern Mediterranean later that year in support of the ongoing Dardanelles (*Gallipoli*) Campaign. There appears to be no record of Seaman-Gunner Butt having been transferred there for the aforesaid week.



(Right above: *The photograph of the cruiser HMS St. George is from the navalhistory.net web-site.*)

The other possibility is a little more vague: a hired...*composite Auxiliary Steamer 3 masted Schooner*...powered by both sail and motor and categorized as a Special Service Vessel. Built in 1890 and weighing some six-hundred forty tons, she was to be armed with a single three-pounder gun and wireless equipment and came into naval service in March of 1915.

Alas! – there is no record of where the ship was stationed during the war-time period other than the vague...*May have had an Auxiliary Patrol role as a wireless-equipped Auxiliary Patrol Group Leader or in special yacht squadrons at home or in Mediterranean* (from *navalhistory.net*).

However, if either was the ship on which Seaman-Gunner Butt was to serve, he did so for only a single week which suggests that the vessel in question was in port at the time.



(Right above: *The photograph of 'St. George' - from the archives of the Royal Yacht Squadron - is from the titanicofficers.com web-site*)

On July 8, 1915, Seaman-Gunner Butt was back...*on strength*...at HMS *Attentive*, there to again serve on the *Dover Petrol* vessel *Othello II*.

As seen in an above paragraph, the role of *Othello II* and the other like ships of the *Patrol* was to ensure the safety of the larger vessels plying the waters of the Dover Straits. One of the *Patrol's* duties was mine-sweeping.

(Right below: *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*)

The following is taken from a British Admiralty report of the sinking of His Majesty's Trawler *Othello II*:

The 206-ton armed Admiralty trawler was part of the Dover minesweeping force which became another victim of the German U-boat UC-6's minefield. On October 31, 1915, she was ordered by the Minesweeping Officer, Dover, Commander W.G. Rigg, to move to "Section Two", an area near the Gull Lightship. As she battled against a strong gale to get there, she hit a mine at 11.55 am. The explosion broke her nearly in two and she started sinking immediately.



The wheel-house was so distorted by the explosion that neither the door nor the windows would open. Trapped inside as the water rose up around them were the skipper, the second-in-command, the helmsman and a deck boy.

The three men managed to squeeze the boy out of a partially-open window, but could not follow themselves. The boy was the only one saved out of the ten aboard. As a result of this incident, orders were given to remove all the sliding doors of the trawlers' wheelhouses and to replace them with canvas screens which could be pushed out in an emergency. This is said to have saved a number of lives in later sinkings. – Admiralty Report

(Right: *This monument in Freshwater Cemetery commemorates the sacrifice of Seaman Frederick James Butt. – photograph from 2011(?)*)

The son of George Hilliard Butt, fisherman, and of Mary Jane Butt (née *LeShane?*) of Freshwater in the District of Bay de Verde, he was also brother of Elizabeth, William-Alfred**, Nathaniel-Harold, Elsie-Charlotte, Josiah, Malcolm, Gladys, Beatrice, and to Alice-Maud (deceased aged ten months).

Frederick James Butt died on October 31, 1915, in the sinking of *Othello II* at the recorded age of twenty years: date of birth in Freshwater, Newfoundland, October 14, 1895 (from a copy of Freshwater Parish Records and also from his enlistment papers) – likely not 1893 as recorded elsewhere.



Seaman Butt 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 Frederick James Butt was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal (centre) and the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) – seen on preceding page.



*****William-Alfred Butt, having reportedly served for fifteen months in the Royal Naval Reserve – he was Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve, Number 1594x, enlisting at the same time as brother Frederick – before subsequently enlisting into the Canadian Army in Sydney or Halifax, Nova Scotia, on August 22 of 1916, and became Number 248513 of the ‘Draft giving Field Artillery (Howitzer) Ammunition Column’, to eventually become a Gunner of the 3rd Brigade of the Canadian Field Artillery.***

He sailed to the United Kingdom from Halifax on October 4, 1916 on the SS ‘California’ and disembarked nine days later, October 13, in Liverpool whereupon he was transported to the Canadian Military Establishment at Shorncliffe in the county of Kent to serve in the Canadian Field Artillery Reserve Brigade.

Having crossed the English Channel to the Continent of January 19, 1917, it was not until March 19-20 that Gunner Butt joined the 3rd Brigade, CFA, in the field, possibly just in time to serve at Vimy Ridge.

(Right: Ammunition being brought up to the guns, likely in France in 1916 – from Illustration)



Slightly wounded in the neck on April 14-15 Gunner Butt was hospitalized in France to be later transferred to England where he was to remain until mid-October before being dispatched back to France. ‘Taken on strength’...at the Canadian Artillery Pool (Reserve) it was not to be until November 5 that he would return to his unit in the field.

There he was apparently to serve without incident with the 3rd Brigade of the Canadian Field Artillery until after the end of hostilities. On December 30 he was ordered back into the Reserve and thence to the United Kingdom, to remain there until the following February until his repatriation on a vessel aptly named ‘Canada’ which sailed from Liverpool for Halifax on February 2 of 1919.