

DAWE, W. H.



Seaman William Henry Dawe, Number 1174x, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on a bronze beneath the Caribou at the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

Having been summoned to service by the naval authorities, Seaman William Henry Dawe, fisherman, apparently travelled from the District of Port de Grave to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on August 25 of 1914. There he reported ...to duty...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

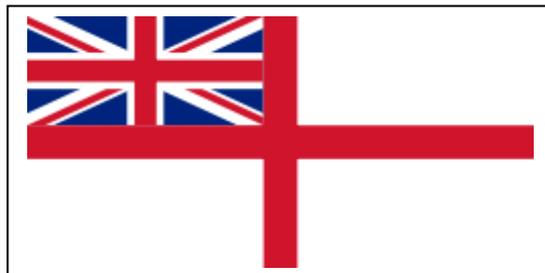
Having already enlisted into the Royal Naval Reserve in the first month of that 1914, William Henry Dawe had on January 15 undergone a satisfactory medical assessment and begun the requisite period of twenty-eight days training.

Thus on the aforesaid August 25 any further training or medical examination was thereupon waived by Royal Proclamation although it is not clear whether or not William Henry Dawe was to be required at that time to pledge his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V, or if that also by then was a *fait accompli* dating from seven months prior.



(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.



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An elderly vessel, H.M.S. 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.

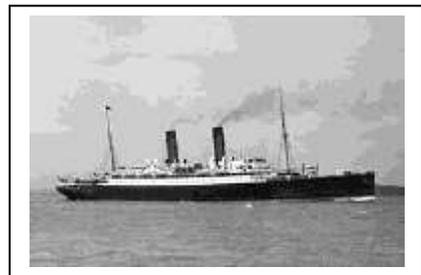
(Preceding page: HMS 'Calypso' in full sail. She was to be re-named 'Briton' in 1916 when a new 'Calypso', a modern cruiser, was launched by the Royal Navy. – photograph by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)

Following some five weeks of training in St. John's, Seaman Dawe, one of a draft of three-hundred five naval reservists, embarked on November 5-6 onto the Cunard ocean-liner Franconia which may have made a deviation from its commercial route from Boston, Massachusetts, while en route to Liverpool, to take the draft on board.



(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)

(Right: A relatively new vessel, 'Franconia' had been launched on July 23 of 1910. Remaining un-requisitioned as a troop transport until early 1915, it was to be well over a year later that on 4 October, 1916, while heading for Salonika, she was torpedoed and sunk by a German U-boat to the east of Malta She was not carrying any troops at the time, but out of her 314 crew members, 12 died. – the photograph is from Wikipedia)



Once having disembarked in the port-city of Liverpool it appears that several of the men were posted directly to a ship. Others were ordered to undergo further training at various Royal Navy establishments and thus, likely having journeyed by train, would have reported to these bases on or about November 15-16.

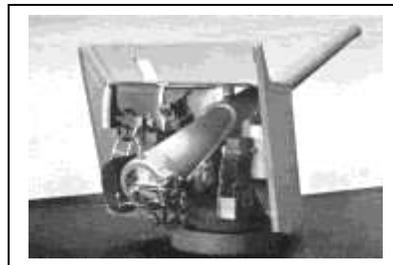
Seaman Dawe appears to have been one of those ordered directly to a ship, in his case it was to be the Calyx, by that time one of sixty larger passenger and cargo vessels which were to be converted for war-time duties.

Built in 1904 for its owner, the Wilson Line, to thereupon be named Calypso, she was a ship of just fewer than three-thousand tons constructed for use on routes from Great Britain to Sweden. Requisitioned soon after the onset of the Great War, her name was changed to Calyx to avoid any confusion with HMS Calypso – whether the one in Newfoundland or the new cruiser of that name soon to be built is not clear: perhaps both – she was fitted and armed with eight 4.7-inch naval guns and two quick-firing three-pounder weapons.

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She went into her war-time service on November 9 of 1914 with Seaman Dawe thus perhaps unlikely to have served on her first patrol with the 10th Cruiser Patrol. As this took place in the harsh north Atlantic waters close to the British Isles, particularly in the area encompassed by Ireland, northern Scotland and Iceland, he might have been happy enough not to do so.

(Right: A British 4.7-inch naval gun such as those mounted onto 'Calyx' – from Wikipedia)



**On June 26 of 1916 Calyx was returned to her mercantile service. However she was unable to escape the War: on July 10, while on her way to Denmark with a general cargo, she was torpedoed and sunk by the German submarine U-53 with a loss of thirty lives.*

Seaman Dawe was to serve on *Calyx* (some of the earlier days perhaps only on paper) until March 27 of the following year, for maybe as few as only four patrols, before being transferred to shore and to *Victory I* in the naval port-city of Portsmouth in the southern English county of Hampshire.

His tenure there was to be of short duration: seventeen days.

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 awaiting a posting on one of His Majesty's ships, facilities which had originally been based in the naval city and port of Portsmouth*; and it was also, as explained further below, the ship to which the majority of the land-based personnel would have been, at least officially and bureaucratically, attached**. At Portsmouth this particular ship 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.



**In many cases the large influx of personnel due to the War necessitated some functions being transferred to other areas of the United Kingdom.*

(Right above: 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 and obsolescent vessel – not so in the case of Victory, of course - was used for this purely bureaucratic purpose.*

The various shore bases and training establishments found around England's coast were often separated into different Divisions; for example Victory II, as with Vivid II, Pembroke II

etc., was assigned at least partially for the training of stokers – many ships were still coal-fired – and of other engine-room specialists.

Being an ordinary seaman, it was to *Victory I* that Seaman Dawe was assigned, likely to the holding barracks as he was to be stationed there for only seventeen days before his transfer – from March 28 until April 14 of that 1915, having been ordered to join the crew of another armed merchant cruiser, HMAMC *Alcantara*.

She was a recently-constructed vessel of almost sixteen-thousand tons of the *Royal Mail Steam Packet Line* and was more heavily armed than Seaman Dawe's previous ship, *Calyx*, having been equipped with eight of those six-inch guns as well as two quick-firing six-pounders, and was manned by a crew of well over three-hundred personnel.

(Right: A six-inch gun such as those mounted on 'Alcantara', although this one has been fitted for coastal defence – photograph from 2010(?) and taken at the Royal Artillery Museum at Woolwich)

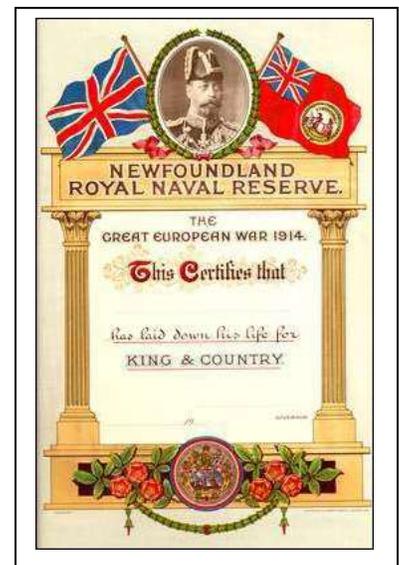


She officially went into service on March 10 of 1915 although she would not sail on her first patrol with the 10th Cruiser Squadron until early May before which time she was still in Liverpool concluding her re-fitting and other necessary preparations prior to departure*. Thus, when exactly Seaman Dawe reported to his ship is not clear.

The 10th Cruiser Squadron, also known as the *Northern Patrol*, was a force originally comprising out-of-date warships which, by that January of 1915, unable to cope with the elements, had been replaced by requisitioned ocean-going passenger-liners and cargo-carriers mounting guns often as elderly as some of the venerable ships on which they were mounted.

The ships of the 10th Cruiser Squadron were not spoiling 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 above-mentioned stormy waters of the north-east Atlantic, a thankless job at the best of times: during the tempestuous winter months, even worse.

Alcantara steamed from Liverpool on May 5 and during the thirty-three days that followed she met with a number of Royal Navy ships – fifteen - some requiring a visit by personnel in the ship's cutter; nor were the seas to the north and north-west of the British Isles as devoid of other traffic as might be imagined: a variety of twenty-five vessels flying British and neutral flags were observed, questioned, at times boarded and even ordered to a British port with a boarding-party in charge.



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The patrols typically lasted about a month by which time fuel and rations – and at times perhaps patience – were beginning to run low. On June 7 *Alcantara* returned to Liverpool for a nine-day period before returning to the North Atlantic.

There was to be little rest for the ship's crew in the days in port that followed: tons of coal had to be loaded – oil was almost still a novelty – and there was always the scrubbing of decks, the cleaning and painting of the vessel, the replenishing of stores, a myriad of small repairs, the maintenance of the ship's cutter and other lesser boats, as well as the most welcome mail and less welcome daily on-board tasks to organize and undertake.

(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 several months that followed brought more of the same as before: four weeks at sea before more than a week ashore if at Liverpool or nearby Birkenhead, only four days if the anchorage at Swarbacks Minn in the Shetlands was visited, as it often was. For those serving on *Alcantara*, that Christmas of 1915 was spent afloat without celebration although the ship was back in Liverpool on December 26, Boxing Day, there to remain until January 14.



(Right above: *The photograph of HMAMC 'Alcantara' is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

On the above-mentioned January 14 she sailed from Liverpool and was engaged in the routine of patrol work for the remainder of that month. The final page of the log-book of that month is for January 31 – not surprisingly - at which time she may have been preparing for the return run to port. At any rate there are no further records available as the log-book for February was likely to have gone down with the ship.



The events of February 29 as presented below are to be found in several sources and again not surprisingly they differ from time to time. The one below, adapted, is to be found on the South West Arm Historical Society web-site:

Reprinted from The Packet, July 3, 2019 by Lester Green

(Left: *Seaman William Peddle and Seaman J. William Peddle. (Photo courtesy of Lana Rowsell)*)

The battle between *Alcantara* and the *Grief* was described by writers as an old-time fight between two armed cruisers. When the gun smoke settled, the two ships were resting on the bottom of the sea. There were twelve Newfoundlanders on board *Alcantara*, among them Hodge's Cove sailor, Seaman William Peddle. He would be Mentioned in Dispatches by his commanding officer.

In March 1916 several world newspapers listed the following news item from London:

LONDON, March 25. — The news was given out here today of a fight in the North Sea between the German raider Greif and the British armed merchant cruiser Alcantara, in which both vessels were sunk. Five German officers and 115 men out of a total of 300 were captured. The British lost five officers and 69 men. The Greif was sunk by gun fire, and the Alcantara by a torpedo.

Among the crew of the *Alcantara* were twelve Newfoundland Royal Naval Reservists. Two sailors from Port de Grave did not survive – Seaman Nathan Mugford and Seaman William Henry Dawe.

Seaman William Peddle of Hodge’s Cove was also a crew member when the ship unexpectedly encountered the German raider disguised as a Norwegian merchant ship. The *Grief* was displaying the name *Rena* and flying the Norwegian flag.

The story of this encounter was recounted many times by Seaman Peddle.

List of Newfoundland Crew aboard the HMS Alcantara

1. Seaman Nathan Mugford 1171X Port de Grave
2. Seaman William H. Dawe 1174X Port de Grave
3. Seaman John Young 546X Upper Island Cove
4. Seaman Alfred Andrews 644X Sheartown
5. Seaman Samuel W. Carter Greenspond
6. Seaman William Peddle Hodge's Cove
7. Seaman Herbert Russell Bay Roberts
8. Seaman Naboth Butt Flat Islands, B.B.
9. Seaman Liol Hann Bel Island
10. Seaman Patrick Bennett St. John's
11. Seaman Augustus Seaward New Perlican
12. Seaman John C. Tucker Port De Grave

(Above: A list of Newfoundland sailors serving on *Alcantara* . Source: Parson’s Book-*The Best Small-Boat Seaman in The Navy*.)

In an interview conducted with James Peddle of Hodge’s Cove during the fall of 2017, he recalled the many stories he had heard from William, or “Uncle Bill”, during visits with his father, Arch Peddle, who had also served in the war.

The following account is James’ re-collection of the events as told by Uncle Bill:

“The *Greif* was a disguised German surface raider that looked like a merchant ship but carried light armour that was hidden. She had raided the coast of England a number of times and the Admiralty ordered a search for this ship. They were searching up around the *Skagerrak* (the German name for the body of water between the Baltic Sea and the North Sea) where the *Greif* used to raid the coast.

Uncle Bill was onboard when they sighted a ship showing the Norwegian colors.

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The *Alcantara* ordered the ship to stop and prepared a boarding party to check for contraband. Uncle Bill was part of the boarding crew when the landing boat was lowered into the water.

Another British ship, *HMS Andes*, that was off in the distance, realized that this was the ship that they were seeking. Immediately they sent an urgent, open message to the *Alcantara* that this was the German raider.

The German raider also picked up the message that said, “You are in the presence of an enemy ship.”

The *Alcantara* response was, “Where?”

The *Andes* responded, “The ship that you are about to board.”

The *Greif* also heard and understood the messages and responded with running up the German colors.

Both ships were stopped when the *Greif* started to fire its guns.

The *Alcantara* responded, but as for Uncle Bill and the boarding party who were hanging over the side when the *Alcantara* started to move, they were in great danger of losing their life.

Some of the men in the boarding boat were shot. Uncle Bill was about to climb up the rope but stepped aside to allow the officer of the boarding party to climb first. When Uncle Bill got to the deck, the officer was lying dead on the deck. None of the others from the boarding party survived.

In the ensuing battle both ships were disabled and eventually sank. When Uncle Bill was about to abandon the ship, he noticed a fellow sailor with a broken leg. He got a lifejacket and gave the fellow his hat. Then he helped him into the water.

Uncle Bill was picked up by one of the British ships and the ship continued to pick-up survivors.

The crew of the rescue ship noticed what appeared to be a periscope. They fired upon what they believed was a German submarine.

Uncle Bill, however, always believed that it was not a submarine but a lifeboat from the *Greif*.



After Uncle Bill had returned to his base, he received a box in the mail. He opened it up and inside was the hat that he had given the sailor with the broken leg. That’s all I can remember about that story told by Uncle Bill.”

{Left: *Oak leaf spray worn on Victory Medal.*}

For his actions during this encounter Seaman William Peddle was Mentioned in Dispatches (MID). It is denoted by oak leaf emblem worn on the ribbon of the Victory (Inter-Allied) Medal.

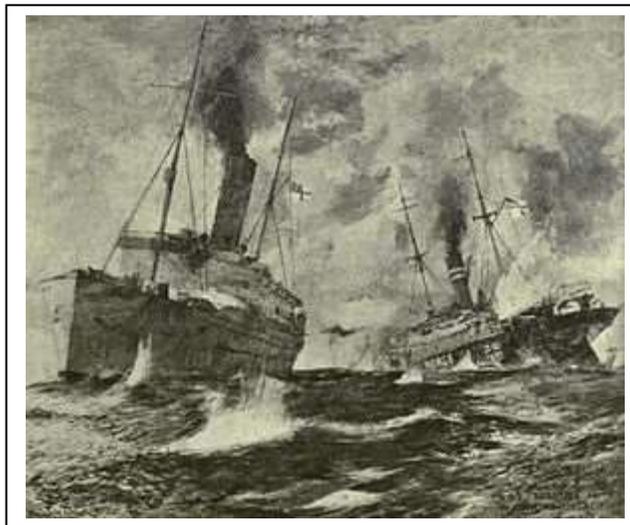
Seaman Peddle returned safely to Hodge’s Cove after the war where he spent many hours recalling stories from the war.

He passed away in 1964 at the age of 84 years old and rests in the Anglican Cemetery in Hodge’s Cove.

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A more detailed record of the action – once again adapted - as found in *Wikipedia*, follows:

At about 8:45 in the morning on February 29, Alcantara was steaming north-north-east up its patrol line, when lookouts spotted smoke off the port beam; Captain Wardle manoeuvred closer to identify the source of the smoke. Unbeknownst to him, the smoke was from SMS Greif. A few minutes later Andes signalled "Enemy in sight north-east 15 knots" [17 mph (27 km/h)]. Wardle ordered Alcantara to turn north at maximum speed and soon sighted a ship with one funnel, flying Norwegian flags. Another message from Andes described a two-funnelled ship and the identity of the ship in sight remained doubtful.



(Right above : An artist's impression of HMS Alcantara (left) and SMS Greif dueling at close range during the action of 29 February, 1916 – from Wikipedia)

A few minutes later, Andes was seen to starboard, apparently steaming north-east at speed, as if in pursuit. Before joining the chase, Wardle decided to examine the unknown ship, went to action stations and fired two blanks to force it heave to. By 09:20, Wardle had received a signal by Andes that it had altered course to the south-east, which only added to the ambiguity, because the ship hove to could not be the one being pursued. The lookouts on the Alcantara could see the Norwegian name Rena on the stern and that the ship looked authentic.

A boat was lowered from Alcantara when it was about 1,000 yards (910 metres) astern to check the ship's particulars, as the voyage of the Rena had been notified to the Admiralty. Wardle signalled to the Andes of developments and Captain Young replied with "This is the suspicious ship". As the message was being read, a gun at the stern of the "Rena" was unmasked and flaps fell down along the sides, revealing more guns. Greif opened fire, hitting the boat containing the boarding party and also Alcantara's telemotor steering gear before the British ship could reply. Alcantara's gunners opened fire and the ship closed with the raider as it began to get under way. For about fifteen minutes the ships exchanged fire; Andes opened fire as it arrived and Greif began to disappear in smoke. The German gunners ceased fire and boats full of survivors were seen pulling away from the smoke. Alcantara was badly damaged and also ceased fire, apparently torpedoed and listing to port; Wardle ordered an abandon ship and by 11:00 a.m. the list had put Alcantara on its beam ends (on the brink of capsizing); it sank with 69 members of the crew.

Hotham in Comus, the most northern of the cruisers from Scapa, had seen the signals from Andes and sailed south in company with the destroyer Munster; he arrived as the action ended, beginning rescue work with the crew of the Alcantara as it sank. Andes had reported a submarine between it and the lifeboats and could not close; after several

submarine alarms, Comus and Andes moved closer to the wreck of Greif and sank it with gunfire; about 220 men of its crew of 360 were rescued.

The son of Abraham (also found as *Abram*) Dawe (also found as *Daw*), fisherman, and of Rebecca (also found as *Rebecka*) Dawe (née *Dawe** (sic)) of Ship Cove, District of Port de Grave, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Eli, Eliza, Harold, Ida, Cyril, Alice and to Alan.

**The couple had been married in the community of Bareneed on January 17 of 1895.*

Seaman William Henry Dawe was recorded as having been...*killed in action...* on February 29 of 1915 at the reported age of twenty-one years: date of birth in Darrell's Hole, Port de Grave, Newfoundland, March 6, 1895 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).



(Right above: *The sacrifice of William Henry Dawe – but found here as William A. Dawe – is honoured of the Port de Grave War Memorial. – photograph from 2010*)

Seaman Dawe 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 William Henry Dawe was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

