

DYER, W. G.



Seaman William Gerrard Dyer, Number 2170x, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on a bronze beneath the Caribou at the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

Having decided to *answer the call* of the naval authorities for volunteers, William Gerrard Dyer travelled from his recorded home in not-distant Logy Bay to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on November 3 of 1914, he reported...*to duty*\*...on the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

Having apparently having undertaken no prior service in the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland), William Gerrard Dyer enlisted on that November 3, underwent a satisfactory medical assessment on the same day, and signed on for a single year's war-time service. It would also have been about this time that he pledged 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.**

**(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)**

**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: *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)



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: 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, *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.

Following a mere fifteen days of training\* in St. John's, Seaman Dyer, one of a draft of one-hundred forty-nine naval reservists, embarked on November 18-19 onto the *Allan Line* ocean-liner *Carthaginian* which was apparently returning on its commercial route from Philadelphia(?) to Glasgow and thereupon took the draft on board. She sailed at nine o'clock in the evening of the 19<sup>th</sup>, its reservist passengers un-mentioned in the local newspapers.

(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*)



\*It appears that in many cases, even if the recruit in question had not already previously been with the Royal Naval Reserve, the required twenty-eight day training period, all or partially, was waived by 'Royal Proclamation'.

(continued)



**(Preceding page: A relatively elderly vessel, 'Carthaginian' had been launched in October of 1884. She apparently remained un-requisitioned as a troop transport during the conflict although this did not prevent her from being sunk by a mine laid by a U-boat off the Irish coast on June 14 of 1917 – happily without any loss of life it may be added. – the un-dated photograph of Carthaginian entering St. John's harbour has been donated to the Maritime History Archive web-site by Captain Harry Stone. )**

Once having disembarked in the United Kingdom it appears that while some few of the men were posted directly to a ship, the majority was ordered directly to undergo further training at various Royal Navy establishments and thus, likely having journeyed by train, reported to these bases on or about November 28-29.

Seaman Dyer was to report to HMS *Pembroke*\*, the naval establishment at Chatham on the River Medway, itself a tributary of the better-known River Thames, and in the county of Kent. Not only was it a barracks – it operated from 1878 until 1983 – but it was the name given to a number of training establishments, mostly not far-removed from Chatham, which were numbered according to the purpose of the training – or otherwise - involved.

*Pembroke I* was the base for regular seamen and it was to *Pembroke I* that Seaman Dyer would be attached, there to await a posting to one of His Majesty's ships.

*\*There was also a series of ships named 'Pembroke', the last several of which were used as depot ships and for harbour service at Chatham. This is the 'HMS Pembroke' found on the cap-bands of the sailors who served there perhaps in their thousands - but who were never to set eyes on the actual ship in question.*

*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.*

*Thus the presence of elderly and obsolescent vessels that plied the waters adjacent to the many naval land establishments which were known as stone frigates. The ships were in theory the home ships of the tens, hundreds, even thousands of men who laboured on shore.*



*Which is why Seaman Dyer would have worn an HMS 'Pembroke' hat-band – until he joined 'Clan McNaughton'.*

**(Right above: A part of the large Royal Navy complex which was the HMS 'Pembroke' naval establishment at Chatham for just over one hundred years. Today it has been transformed into a university campus. – photograph from 2010)**

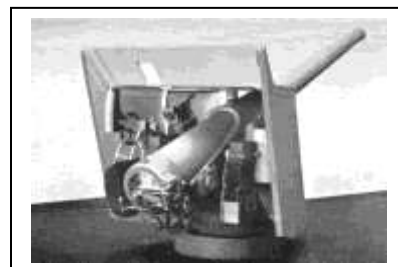
The ship to which Seaman Dyer was ordered on December 10-11 of that same 1914 was HMS *Clan McNaughton*, reportedly at Liverpool on December 4, likely the port from where she was to sail on patrol with the 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron some days before that Christmas.

(Right: *The image of Clan MacNaughton – with unfortunately no further details - is from the Royal Marines History.com web-site.*)



The vessel, a passenger-cargo ship of the *Clan Line*, had been hired by the British on November 19 of that autumn and had been fitted out with eight 4.7 inch naval guns for the purpose of serving as an armed merchant cruiser.

But although a number of Newfoundland reservists had been sent upon arrival in the United Kingdom to train at HMS *Excellent*, the Royal Navy's gunnery school, Seaman Dyer had not been among them and he was posted to *Clan MacNaughton* to likely serve as an ordinary seaman.



(Right: *An example of the naval gun with which Clan MacNaughton had been equipped prior to sailing on her war-time duties. – from Wikipedia*)

*Clan MacNaughton* was to be attached to the 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron, also known as the *Northern Patrol*, a force originally comprised of out-of-date warships which, unable to cope with the elements, by that January of 1915, had been replaced by requisitioned ocean-going passenger-cargo ships carrying a few guns, in some cases as elderly as some of the venerable vessels on which they were mounted.

The ships of the 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron were not spoiling – and certainly not prepared - 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 area of the stormy waters encompassed by Ireland, northern Scotland and Iceland, a thankless job at the best of times: during the tempestuous winter months, even worse.

Even so, the first several weeks of her service appear to have been uneventful and *Clan MacNaughton* apparently was to return to Liverpool on one if not two occasions before setting out to sea once again on what was to be her last voyage\*.

*\*It appears not to be recorded whether she was in the company of 'Viknor' when that vessel left the Squadron to return to Liverpool in mid-January, not to be seen again before her discovery on the ocean floor almost a century later.*

The weather during that part of the winter of 1914-1915 was apparently foul and the last message from *Clan MacNaughton*, sent by radio by her captain on February 3, was that the ship – on patrol off the north coast of Ireland and west of the Hebrides - was in...*terrible weather.*

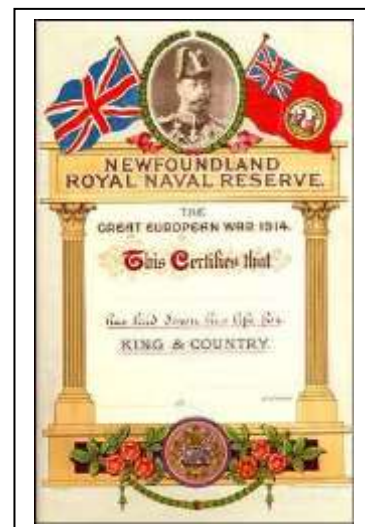
She was not heard from again.

The cause of her loss has never been ascertained: she may simply have been the victim of the weather as reported by her captain; or perhaps, as originally thought, she had encountered a German mine although apparently the vessel was not particularly close to a mine-field.

A third theory suggests a combination of circumstances: the weather, perhaps a top-heavy ship because of the eight naval guns that she was carrying (just more than two tons per gun), and an inexperienced crew all may have contributed to her loss.

*(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)*

While he is documented by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission as having been the son of Mrs. Helen Dyer of Logy Bay in the District of St. John's East, there appears to be no other information available pertaining either to her or to any other family members.



Seaman William Gerrard Dyer died on that February 3 of 1915 at the *recorded* age of thirty-one years: date of birth in Logy Bay(?), St John's East, Newfoundland, March 3, 1884 (from the Royal Navy War Graves Roll).

*Seaman Dyer 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 Gerrard Dyer was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

