



Seaman Gilbert Dyke, Number 702x, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on a bronze beneath the Caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

Having decided to volunteer for the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland), Gilbert Dyke had initially presented himself for enlistment on January 6 of 1911, whereupon he was to undergo twenty-eight days of training, until February 2 of the same year.

As with the majority pre-War volunteers, he had joined-up for five years and was to undergo the required annual training of twenty-eight days on at least three occasions during the following thirty-six months. November and December of 1913 saw his final term of service on *Calypso* before the events of that summer of 1914 intervened and dictated that he be called to war-time service.

Summoned from home *to service* during the autumn of that same year, Gilbert Dyke travelled from his family residence at Salvage Bay, District of Bonavista Bay, to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, in November – some three months after the British *Declaration of War* – he was once again to report...*to duty*...to the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

It was on the fifth day of that autumn month that Gilbert Dyke was signed on for war-time service* and it was likely to have been at this time – if he had not already done so - that he also attested, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor.

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(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 in the uniform of an Admiral of the Fleet is from the Royal Collection Trust web-site, 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.)

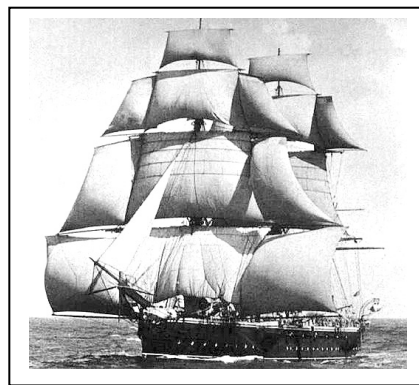
***The Union Flag is commonly referred to as the ‘Union Jack’; this is, in fact, a misnomer since a flag is referred to as a ‘Jack’ only when flown from the bow of a ship.**

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 at a minimum.

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.



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: H.M.S. '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 two weeks less a day of duties in St. John's – although no training* is cited in his records - Seaman Dyke, 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 19th, its reservist passengers unmentioned 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 often waived by 'Royal Proclamation'.**

(Right above: 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. Apparently, in the case of Seaman Dyke, he was to report to a ship on whose nominal roll his name appears on November 19, the day he sailed from Newfoundland: *Viknor*.

In the case of many of the first Newfoundland Reservists to travel overseas this initial posting was to be HMS *Excellent*, the Royal Navy Gunnery School on Whale Island just off Portsmouth Harbour. A goodly number of these *seaman-gunners* was subsequently to be

attached to three of His Majesty's Armed Merchant Cruisers which were soon to be lost with a heavy loss of life, many of them from the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland).

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

Two of these vessels were HMS *Clan Mc Naughton* and HMS *Bayano*. The other, the first to be lost, was HMS *Viknor* to which, as seen above, Seaman Dyke was to be dispatched immediately upon his arrival in the United Kingdom.

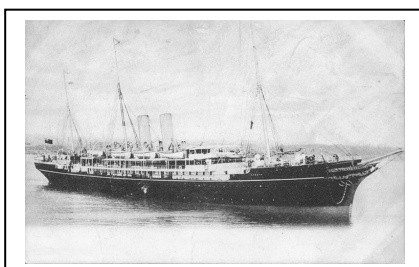
The Armed Merchant Cruiser *Viknor* was an elderly ship, obsolete and apparently under-powered with a top speed of only fourteen knots. In her earlier lives she had firstly been, as of 1888, the SS *Atrato*, before then having been re-named as the SS *Viking* in 1912. Upon the outbreak of the *Great War* in 1914 she had been requisitioned by the British Admiralty and baptized on that third occasion as HMS *Viknor*.



(Right below: *The elderly luxury cruise-liner 'Atrato' seen here in her pre-War condition and before she was to be requisitioned for naval service – from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site*)

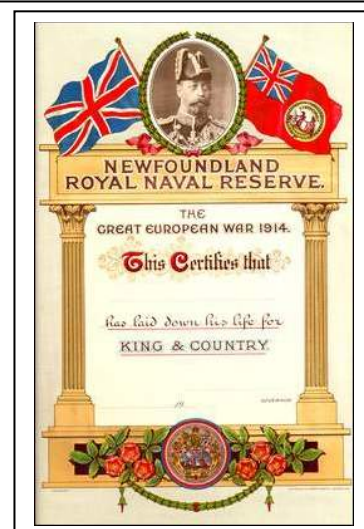
At the time of Seaman Dyke's transfer to *Viknor*, the ship was apparently based on the River Tyne in the north-east of England. She was not to leave port until December 28 and not to join her squadron (see below) until January 1.

'*Viknor*' was to be attached to the 10th Cruiser Squadron, also known as the *Northern Patrol*, a force originally having comprised out-of-date warships which, by that January of 1915, had proved unequal to the elements and had been replaced by requisitioned ocean-going passenger-liners carrying a few guns, those at times as old as – or more than – the ships on which they were mounted.



The ships of the 10th Cruiser Squadron, although armed, 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 stormy waters encompassed by northern Scotland, Ireland and Iceland, a thankless job at the best of times: during the tempestuous winter months, even worse.

In early January the ships of the *Northern Patrol* stopped a Norwegian vessel, the *Bergensfjord*, and transferred a number of persons, one of them a suspected spy, to *Viknor*, she then being ordered to proceed to Liverpool.



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

From what is known about *Viknor*, she was hardly a vessel fit for the task at hand and January and February of 1915 were to apparently be particularly stormy. What is more, a German counterpart, the steamship *Berlin*, had recently been reported in the area sowing mines – one of which had already sunk the British battleship *Audacious* some three months before.

It still remains a mystery as to what happened to *Viknor* although it appears to be that either she fell victim to the bad weather or that she was sunk by a mine. All that may be sent with any great certainty is that there was not to be a single survivor: of the crew of three-hundred two, including twenty-five of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland), all were to perish*.

**Her wreck was found off the coast of County Donegal, Ireland, in the year 2006, but no conclusion was to come about as to the cause of the ship's sinking.*

The son of John Martin Dyke, fisherman, and of Louisa Dyke (née *Parsons**) of the Bonavista Bay community of Salvage, he was also younger brother to Detlive-Martin.

(Right above: *This monument is in part dedicated to their son Gilbert by his parents John and Louisa Dyke and stands in Holy Cross Anglican Cemetery, Eastport. – photograph from 2013*)

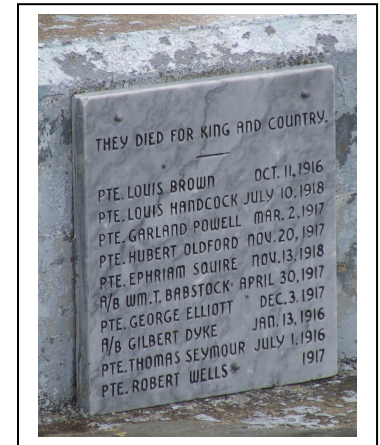
**The couple had married in Harbour Grace on May 18, 1891.*

Seaman Charles Gilbert Dyke died on January 13 of 1915, at the reported age of twenty-three years: date of birth in Salvage, Newfoundland, July 20, 1992, (from Royal Navy records), but found as July 23 of 1893 in the Newfoundland Birth Register as well as Newfoundland Vital Statistics – although this last-mentioned is likely a copy of the Register.

(Right above: *The sacrifice of Seaman Gilbert Dyke is honoured on the War Memorial in the community of Eastport. The year of his death is not correct. – photograph from 12013*)

Seaman Dyke served only in the Royal Navy, not in the service of Canada as is cited in some sources, notably the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Seaman Gilbert Dyke was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



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.