



Seaman Thomas Albert Ginn, Number 2266x, is buried in Gillingham (Woodlands) Cemetery: Grave reference Naval. 18. 957.

(continued)

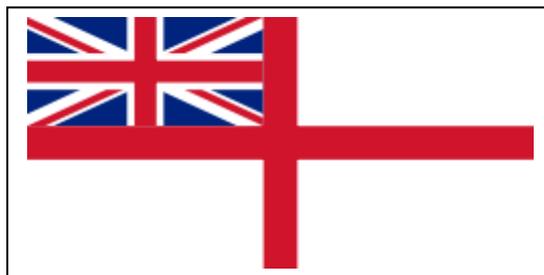
Having relinquished his occupation, likely that of fisherman, and having then travelled from the community of Fogo in the District of the same name to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on November 6 of 1916 Thomas Albert Ginn reported...*to duty...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS Briton, moored in the harbour (see below).*

On that same November day he enlisted for the first time into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for the...*Duration of the War**...and 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.*)

**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.

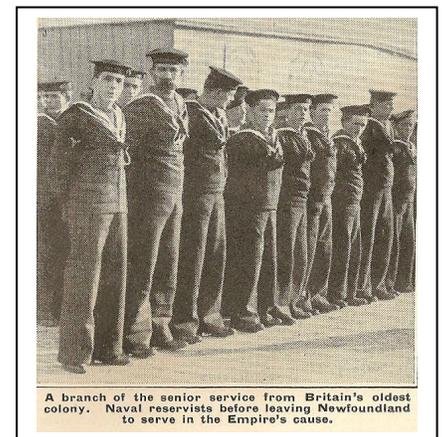
Of course, the purpose of having a reserve force at any time is to provide a trained force ready at any time to serve at a time of need or crisis. Thus in August of 1914, upon the Declaration of War by the government in London, hundreds of those men of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) were to make their way to St. John's, from there to take passage overseas to bolster the ranks of the Royal Navy.



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-commissioned HMS 'Briton' in early 1916 when a new 'Calypso', a modern cruiser, was about to be launched by the Royal Navy. – This photograph, taken of the 'Newfoundland Calypso' by the Royal Navy in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)

(Right: Naval reservists from Newfoundland, during the early days of the Great War, before their departure for the United Kingdom - from The War Illustrated)



(Right below: The newly-constructed C-Class cruiser 'Calypso' of 1916, seen here on an un-recorded date during the later years of the Great War, was to be sunk by an Italian submarine in 1940. – from Wikipedia)

Thirty days later, on December 6 of that same year, Seaman Ginn – as one of a draft of fifty naval reservists and a single Chief Petty Officer - departed Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, for the United Kingdom. The transport vessel was the SS Southland en route from Portland, Maine, to Liverpool – the vessel had previously been called Vaderland, a Dutch or Belgian ship whose name had been deemed too Germanic-sounding and which later, in June of 1917, was to be torpedoed and lost while en route from Liverpool to Philadelphia.

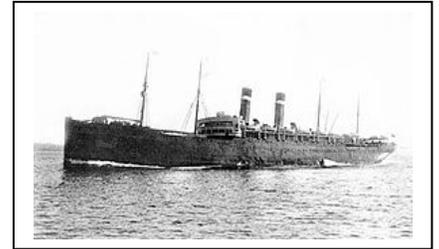


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Of course, Seaman Ginn's draft had left St. John's for Halifax some days before the SS *Southland* sailed for Liverpool. But ascertaining how the reservists were to journey to there has proved to be more than difficult. There were two reasonable possibilities for a contingent of some fifty persons: by train to Port aux Basques, a ferry-ride across the Cabot Strait, and then a train journey once again on to Halifax; or there was the direct passage by ship from St. John's to Halifax – both means of transport necessitating up to three days' travel.

Whichever was to be the case, a revised schedule saw *Southland* leave Halifax three days late, on December 6, and arrive in Liverpool eleven days afterwards, on December 17.

Once having set foot in the United Kingdom, the Naval personnel would have been either posted directly to a ship, ordered to undergo further training or to await a posting, at one of various Royal Navy establishments – these for the most part around the coast of England. In the case of Seaman Ginn, the destination was to be HMS *Pembroke I* at Chatham in the English county of Kent.



(Right above: *The photograph of the Red Star Line – later White Star-Dominion Line - ship 'Vaderland' – later 'Southland' – is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

Pembroke I (the establishment had several Divisions) was the base and holding barracks for regular seamen and it was therefore *Pembroke I* to which Seaman Ginn was to be attached.

**There was also a series of ships named 'Pembroke', the last several of which were to be employed 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 same sailors were serving on land.

Thus the explanation for the often elderly and obsolescent vessels that plied the waters adjacent to the many naval land establishments – also known as 'stone frigates' – and which were in theory the home ships of the above-mentioned numbers of men in naval uniform who laboured ashore.

Which is why Seaman Ginn would have worn an 'HMS Pembroke' cap-band - as will be later seen.

(Right: *Some still-impressive buildings 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*)



Seaman Ginn was to remain stationed at *Pembroke I* for twenty weeks plus a day – he had been on *Pembroke I*'s nominal roll since his departure from Newfoundland – until April 24-25 of 1917 when he was ordered dispatched to HMS *Idaho*, since August of 1916 the name given to the Auxiliary Patrol and Q-ship Base at Milford Haven in the principality of Wales*.

**As was the case at 'Victory', there was also a ship of the same name to which the base personnel was attached; she was a requisitioned steam yacht, HMS 'Idaho', armed with a single one-pounder quick-firing gun and which was used at Milford Haven during the Great War as a local patrol vessel and apparently later as a tug-boat.*

Idaho's role was also to act as a base ship, to be responsible for the personnel, the arming, fuelling, provisioning, maintenance as well as the finances of a flotilla of smaller boats, usually trawlers and drifters and the such-like which operated out of the Haven.

Seaman Ginn was to serve at *Idaho* for exactly eight weeks until June 20 although exactly what his duties were to be – either on HMS *Idaho* the ship, or at shore-based facilities which went by the same name – is not clear; but his service records do not document any service on board any small boat of the aforementioned flotilla.

On June 21 of that 1917 he was back on *Pembroke I*'s books.

In fact, he had now been ordered to return to the *Royal Navy Barracks* at Chatham – the home of HMS *Pembroke* – to likely again await a summons to a ship. He was still to be there at the time of his demise.

He and three other Newfoundland Reservists of *Pembroke I* (see elsewhere among these files) were to be billeted at the *Barracks* at a time when there was apparently some overcrowding and so the Drill Hall with its glass roof had been requisitioned as a dormitory.

This was now the beginning of the period when the Germans were to send their large *Gotha* bombers over England during the night-time. On the night of September 3-4 the towns of Chatham and Gillingham, both naval communities, were the selected targets, the bombers' job apparently made easy by the absence of a blackout and any anti-aircraft activity.

(Right: *This photograph of the glass-covered Drill Hall at the Chatham Royal Naval Barracks in or about 1905 is from the 'campus.medway.ac.uk > history' web-site.*)



There were apparently some nine-hundred men accommodated in the above-mentioned Drill Hall at the time. The damage was done by two bombs and by the glass roof transformed into flying projectiles by the explosions.

(Right: *The image of the funeral procession of September 6, 1917, is from the 'sussexhistoryforum.co.uk.' web-site.*)



The aforementioned *sussexhistoryforum.co.uk*. web-site article from which this present information is drawn cites that ninety men had been killed at the time and that a further forty had been expected to die of wounds in the aftermath.

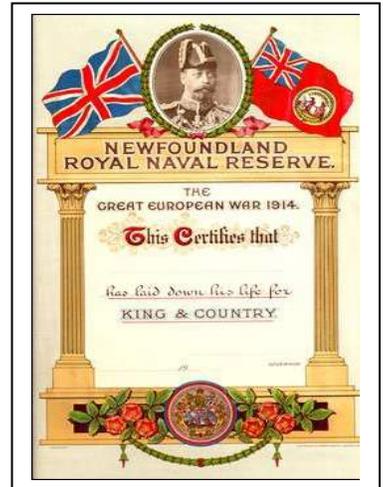
A mass funeral was undertaken on September 6 for the majority of the dead to be interred in *Woodlands Cemetery*, Gillingham, as seen on the first page of this file, with several more later buried once they had been identified.

The son of Walter Scott Ginn, fisherman, and of Emily Maria (née *Bowns**; deceased by 1918), Newfoundland, he was also brother to Arthur.

**The couple had married in Fogo on December 22, 1911. After the passing of Emily Maria, he married widow Elizabeth Osmond on December 21 of 1917. They were to have a son, Edward, in 1921.*

(Right above: 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).

(Right: The photograph of Seaman Thomas Albert Ginn was taken during the period of his service at HMS 'Pembroke' and is from the Canadian Virtual War Memorial, Veterans' Affairs Canada).



Seaman Ginn was reported as having died on September 4, 1917, during the bombing of the *Royal Naval Barracks*, Chatham, as described above: date of birth in the community of Fogo, Newfoundland, February 4, 1895 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register where the family name is spelled *Gynn* and he is named *Thomas Andrew*).

Seaman Ginn 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 Thomas Alfred Ginn was entitled to the British War Medal (left) 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.