

GOSS, E.



Seaman Eldred Goss, Service Number 357x, having no known last resting-place (although see further below) is commemorated on a bronze beneath the Caribou at the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

Having decided to volunteer for the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland), Eldred Goss had originally presented himself for enlistment on March 3 of 1908, whereupon he was to undergo a twenty-eight day period of training which terminated on the final day of that same month.

Whereas most pre-War volunteers had joined-up for five years, in his case this was to evolve into seven years' service and he was to undergo the required annual training of at least twenty-eight days on five occasions (possibly more) during the following sixty-one months.

March and April of 1914 saw his final term of training on *Calypso* before the events of that summer of 1914 dictated that he be called to war-time service.

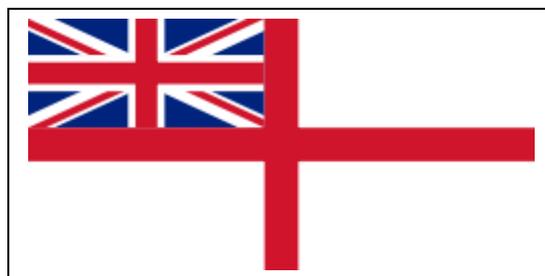
Summoned from home to service several months following the onset of hostilities, Eldred Goss travelled from his family residence in Queen's Cove, Trinity Bay, to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, in November of 1914 – some fourteen-fifteen weeks following the British *Declaration of War* – he was once again to report...to duty...to the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).



On that above-mentioned mid-autumn day, Eldred Goss 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.

(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.

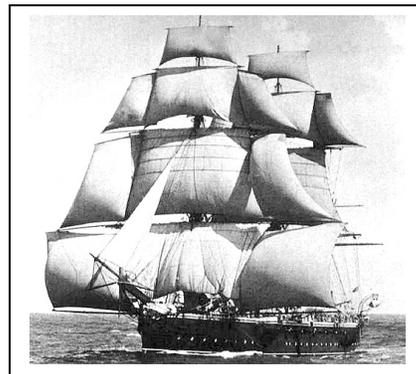
Just fewer than four-hundred men were sought to enroll as seamen – apparently automatically at the rank of Able Seaman - and to present themselves annually in St. John's for five years in order to train for a period of twenty-eight days per annum. Allowed to report at a time of their own choosing, it 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

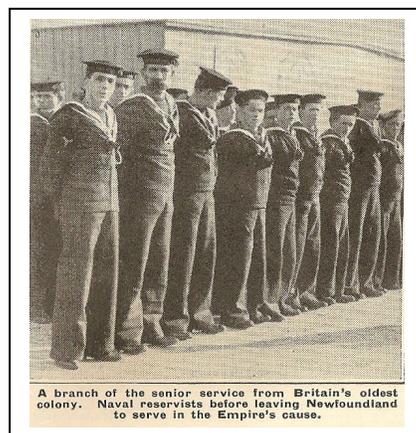
Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) were to make their way to St. John's, from there to take passage overseas to bolster the ranks of the Royal Navy.

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.



(Right: 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)

(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*)



Following a mere few days of duties and perhaps training* in St. John's, Seaman Goss, 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 in Newfoundland. She sailed at nine o'clock in the evening of the 19th, its reservist passengers un-mentioned in the local newspapers.

(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 undated photograph of *Carthaginian* entering St. John's harbour has been donated to the *Maritime History Archive* web-site by Captain Harry Stone.)



***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'.**

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 Goss was not immediately dispatched to a ship, although he soon would be. But at first he was sent to serve until on or about December 5 of that same year at the Royal Naval training establishment HMS *Vivid I** - this Division I for seamen rather than for specialists such as engine-room personnel, for example - based at Plymouth-Devonport.

(Right below: *An imposing main gateway to the once-Royal Navy establishment at Plymouth-Devonport which stands to this day. – photograph from 2011(?)*)

**'Vivid' was the name of a series of pre-War and, later, post-War training stations – although during the war it was to revert to the role of a shore-base and barracks in the counties of Devon and Cornwall, and at other sites in the United Kingdom. It was also the name of an elderly, obsolescent, vessel to which all of the hundreds, even thousands, of the personnel serving in the myriad stations were attached, officially even if, as in many cases, they were never to set foot on or even see the ship.*

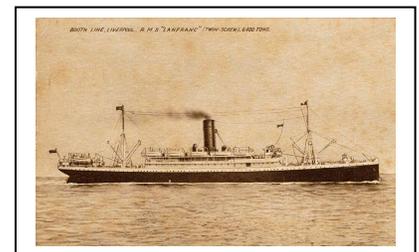


All of this was because of the Naval Discipline Act. The rules and regulations covering the conduct of Royal Navy personnel was unique unto itself, and in order for any sailor to be governed by the Act, he had to be part of a ship's crew. If he were serving on land, he still had to be a member of a ship's crew for the Naval Discipline Act to be in effect.

It was often for this reason only that an old ship and the shore-based establishment shared the same name. In the case of 'Vivid' it was an old gun-boat, originally launched in 1873, which served the purpose, at the same time to be used as a harbour-service vessel.

On the above-mentioned December 5-6, Seaman Goss was transferred from HMS *Vivid I* on land to HMS *Hilary*, there to serve at sea. December 5 was the day on which his draft from *Vivid* was reported as having boarded *Hilary* in the port-city of Liverpool and also the day on which, having been refitted and armed, the vessel was commissioned as one of His Majesty's Ships.

Hilary had been built in 1908 as a cargo and passenger-carrying ship for the *Booth Line* to serve commercial routes between Great Britain and South American destinations, some far up the Amazon River. Having been requisitioned soon after the onset of hostilities, she was to be fitted with six six-inch naval guns and two smaller six-pounder weapons and was to sail with a crew – mostly her peace-time complement supplemented by Royal Navy and Royal Naval Reserve personnel – a total of some two-hundred fifty.

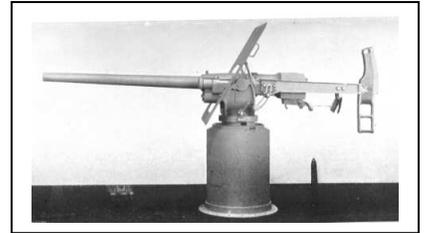


(Right above: *The ship in peace-time shown above is the sister-ship of 'Hilary', the SS 'Lanfranc'. She also was requisitioned for war-time employment but in her case it was to serve as a hospital ship. 'Lanfranc' was also torpedoed and sunk by a U-Boat during the conflict, in April of 1917, a month before 'Hilary' was lost.*



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

HMS *Hilary* came into official service on November 21 of 1914 and first sailed from Liverpool to duty on that December 16. In May, 1917, she was torpedoed while patrolling to the west of the Shetland Islands and the Outer Hebrides, by *U-Boat 88* and was sunk with the loss of four of her crew.



(Right: A Quick-Firing Hotchkiss six-pounder gun such as was mounted on HMS 'Hilary'. – from Wikipedia)

By the time of her sinking, of course, Seaman Goss was no longer a member of *Hilary's* crew. But he was to have served on the ship for some two years and several days.

As recorded above, that service had begun during the first week of December, 1914, the first ten days having been spent berthed in Liverpool with the final arrangements being undertaken before *Hilary* was ordered put to sea.

His Majesty's Armed Merchant Cruiser *Hilary* was to be attached to the 10th 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 10th 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, Iceland and the Shetlands, a thankless job at the best of times: during the tempestuous winter months, even worse.

The task of the ships of the 10th Cruiser Squadron (Northern Patrol) was to intercept the ships passing through the waters listed in an above paragraph, be they flying a British or a foreign flag. The ship might be only spoken to, perhaps boarded for inspection, or even sent with a boarding party to report for further scrutiny to a British or Allied port. All vessels were to be treated with suspicion.

On her first patrol HMS *Hilary* had spent fifty-four days at sea: twenty-six before putting into Glasgow for a week before four weeks' return journey to Birkenhead-Liverpool where she put in for ten days to re-fuel (coal), draw stores and ammunition, do routine maintenance and cleaning and embark prize-crews for the next round of boarding suspect shipping.

There had been at least four deaths by drowning during the patrol – all accidental – these personnel not to be replaced, of course, until her return to port.

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Patrolling was mostly a monotonous routine but apparently necessary – or so thought the *Admiralty* – albeit not very popular among those nations whose commerce was affected. Even though some of the ships stopped were British-owned, this did not afford them any immunity from being questioned and searched and the practice was thus to continue until the year 1917.

During this stormy first winter period experienced by Seaman Goss, fifty-one foreign commercial craft had been intercepted, questioned and boarded, three of which had been subsequently ordered under guard to proceed to Kirkwall, a port and the capital of the Orkney Islands, there their cargoes to be examined. There had likewise been the same formalities performed on ten British merchant and fishing vessels, as well as the sighting, identification of and communication with twenty-one fellow ships of the Royal Navy.

Having sailed from Liverpool in December of 1914, Seaman Goss was then to spend more than five-hundred days at sea on board *Hilary*. The only ports into which the vessel was to put into during all this time would be Liverpool, just once; the city of Glasgow on the River Clyde, Scotland on thirteen occasions; and seven times – usually for just three days - the coaling-station of Busta Voe on an inlet flowing into the Shetland Islands and more or less incommunicado from most places – although its strategic placing allowed the ships of the *Northern Patrol* to spend a great deal more time on the job.

On January 3 of 1917 *Hilary* was back at Glasgow which was when the ship and Seaman Goss were to part company. Apparently his bags were forwarded from the ship to HMS *Pembroke*, a land-based Naval establishment similar to HMS *Vivid* of an earlier page, to which he was at that time to be *officially* attached; but it seems not to have been until January 13 that any personnel followed those bags to *Pembroke*.

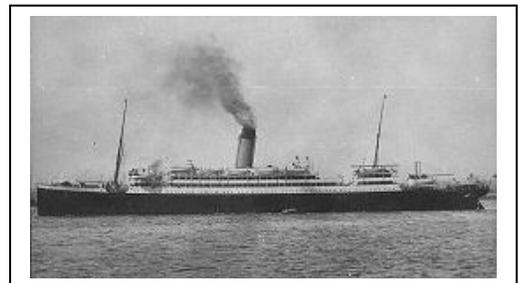
HMS *Hilary* sailed from Glasgow on, January 14, the morrow.

It is not clear whether Seaman Goss was in fact to report in person to HMS *Pembroke* since he may have travelled only as far south as the ports of Birkenhead-Liverpool since, after two years of service at sea, he had been deemed deserving of a month's leave back in Newfoundland. When the details of passage had been decided, the ship on which he was to journey was to be the armed merchant cruiser, HMS *Laurentic*, which was very soon to sail.

Seaman Goss was not to travel alone: a number of other Newfoundland naval reservists, they having by this time also having served long enough to merit some furlough at home, was to travel with him – likely to Halifax – on the ship before onward by train and ferry.

Laurentic was to sail from the aforesaid Birkenhead, the port adjacent to Liverpool, on that January 23 with a reported four-hundred seventy-five* persons on board as well as some forty tons of gold with which to buy munitions in North America.

(Right: *The photograph of 'Laurentic', likely seen here in peace-time as no guns are visible on her decks, is from the Naval-History.net web-site*)



****While it is recorded that ‘Laurentic’ was carrying no passengers or troops, it should be remembered that some of those on board were returning home for leave or for repatriation.***

While passing by the north-west coast of Ireland on the morning of January 25, the ship unexpectedly put into the small town of Buncrana in *Lough* (*Lough* is pronounced as in *Loch Ness*) *Swilly* to put ashore several sick crew-members. At five o'clock on that same afternoon *Laurentic* was under way again.

She then passed through the protective boom at the entrance to *Lough Swilly* and gathered speed – it was apparently for her speed that she had been chosen to carry the gold as she could out-run most ships and any U-boat. She was barely three kilometres from the coast when she struck two German mines in quick succession and rapidly began to sink; after the second explosion there was to be no power and thus no distress signal could be sent.

(Right above and right: *The Memorial to those who perished on that January 25 of 1916 during the sinking of HMS ‘Laurentic’; and the churchyard of St. Mura of the Church of Ireland at Upper Fahan, Ireland, wherein stands the aforesaid Memorial and where many remains of the dead lie to this day, some identified, most not – photographs from 2011*)

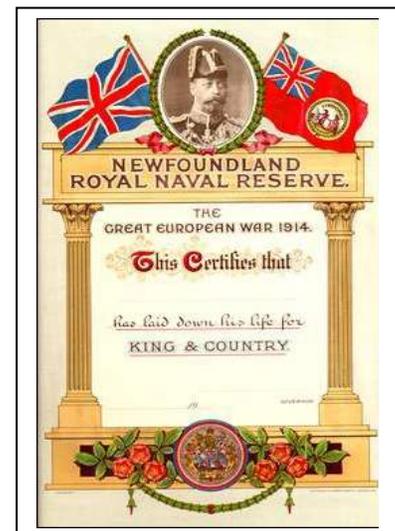
There was scarcely time to lower the life-boats although apparently all on board *Laurentic*, apart from perhaps some engine-room personnel who were already dead, were able to board them. It was to do them little good.

A snow-storm was blowing and most of the men were not clothed to resist it. Any help had to travel the length of the *Lough* and then through open seas to reach them. Apparently the nearest land could only be reached in the teeth of the gale that was blowing, a wind reckoned to be at minus twelve degrees, and the boats were filling with water.

And those that eventually managed to land found themselves isolated on the rocky, barren, un-inhabited coast of Donegal.

Little wonder, perhaps, that of the four-hundred seventy-five on board *Laurentic*, three-hundred fifty-four were to die.

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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 while serving in the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve*)

The son of Eldred Goss and of Sarah Ann Goss (née Vey*) who had married on October 6, 1884, he was also brother to Olivia and to Eleazer. Sarah Ann had passed away on January 2 of 1899 in Long Beach and widower Robert Goss had later wed widow Sarah Jane Clarke, as a result of which had then been born Bertram, Evelyn and Oliver-Whitmore, his half-siblings.

Seaman Eldred Gosse was reported as having died in the...*sinking of HMS Laurentic*...on January 25 of 1917 at the age of thirty years: date of birth in Long Beach, Trinity Bay, Newfoundland, July 6 of 1887 (from his enlistment papers).

Seaman Goss 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 Eldred Goss was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) 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.

