

GOSSE, W.



Seaman Walter Gosse (also found as Goss), Number 1400x, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on a bronze beneath the Caribou at the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

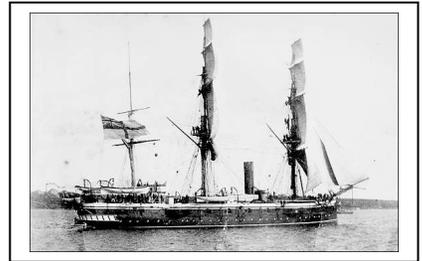
Having decided to answer the call of the naval authorities, he thereupon travelled from the not-distant District of Harbour Grace to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on November 23 of 1914, Walter Gosse reported...to duty...on the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS Calypso, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that same November 23 he enlisted - for the first time? - into the Reserve (see further below) and was signed on to serve for a single year's* war-time service. He also likely attested at this time, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V.

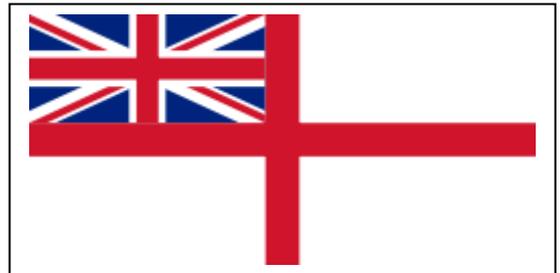
(Right: George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India: as a boy and young man he had served in the Royal Navy from 1877 until 1891 and always retained a fondness for the Senior 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.)



(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.

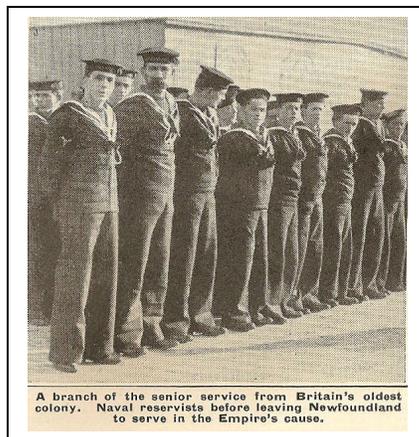


Just fewer than four-hundred men were sought to enroll as seamen – apparently automatically at the rank of Able Seaman - and to present themselves annually in St. John's for five years in order to train for a period of twenty-eight days per annum. Allowed to report at a time of their own choosing, it is perhaps not surprising that these volunteers – mostly fishermen – were to opt to train during the winter months when fishing work was minimal.

(Right 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)

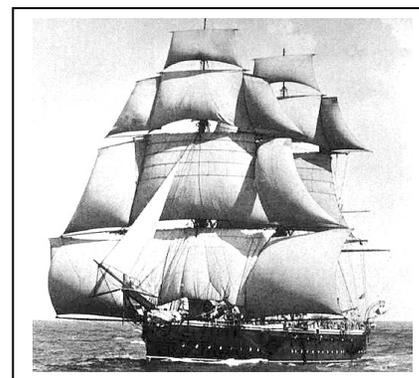
Expenses were apparently defrayed for the most part by the British (Imperial) Government and an attempt was made to ensure the number of recruits would be kept constantly at a maximum. This practice and policy was then to be continued up until the onset of hostilities some twelve years later.

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.



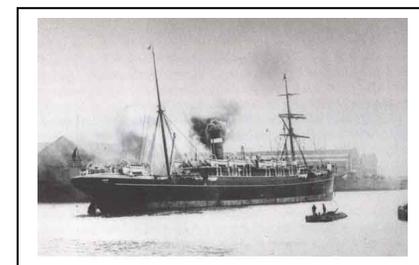
(Right above: Naval reservists from Newfoundland, during the early days of the Great War, before their departure for the United Kingdom - from *The War Illustrated*)

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.



(Right above: H.M.S. '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, taken in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)

Twenty-four days after having first reported to Calypso in St. John's, on December 17 – at this point having been promoted from the rank of Seaman Recruit – the now-Seaman Gosse was one of a draft of one-hundred fifty-three Naval volunteers to board the steamship *Mongolian* in St. John's Harbour for passage across the Atlantic to the United Kingdom. The ship sailed for the Scottish port-city of Glasgow at four o'clock on that same afternoon.



(Right above: Built in 1891 for use by the Allan Line for the transport of emigrants from Europe to North America, 'Mongolian' was a slow vessel with a speed of just twelve knots and was, by 1914, becoming obsolescent. She was nevertheless to be bought in 1914 for use by the Admiralty and remained in service until July 21 of 1918 when she was torpedoed and sunk by U-boat 70 with a loss of thirty-five lives. – photograph from the British Home Child Group International web-site)

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As seen above, Glasgow was to be Seaman Gosse's draft's destination. Upon disembarkation the Naval Reserve personnel would have been either posted directly to a ship or ordered to undergo further training at one of various Royal Navy establishments – these for the most part in England.

In the case of Seaman Gosse, the destination was to be HMS *Vivid I**, the Royal Navy port and facilities at the above-mentioned Plymouth-Devonport.

**The Royal Navy had a disciplinary system which in certain ways differed from civil – and even Army – law; but for it to be employed, a sailor had to be attached to a ship. While at sea, of course, this posed no problem, but when a sailor was performing duties on land that were not associated directly to a particular ship he still had to be held accountable for any untoward behaviour.*

The Navy's training establishments were for the most part on land: Devonport (although apparently only a shore base during the Great War), Chatham, and Portsmouth for example, were terrestrial facilities for many thousands of naval personnel, some of who were permanently stationed there. Thus the practice became to base an elderly or even obsolete ship in the nearby port to be, nominally, the vessel to which this personnel was to be attached. This appears to have been the procedure for the large number of shore bases organized around the coast of the United Kingdom during the Great War.

HMS 'Vivid', the base to which Seaman Gosse had been ordered after his arrival in the United Kingdom from Newfoundland, was not only all the buildings and facilities on shore, but also a small, elderly, nondescript depot ship (originally HMS 'Cukoo', built 1873), to which all the naval personnel was attached and was the name to be emblazoned on the bands of their caps.

These establishments were at times divided into sections: 'Vivid I' was where the seamen (as opposed to engine-room personnel, for example, who were sent to 'Vivid II') such as Seaman Gosse were initially to be stationed.

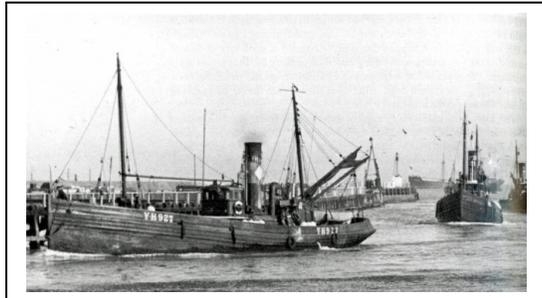
(Right: A main gateway to the once-Royal Navy establishment at Plymouth-Devonport – photograph from 2011(?))

Seaman Gosse was to serve at *Vivid I* from the time of his arrival in the United Kingdom until February 24-25 of the following year, 1915. He was thereupon transferred to *Vivid II* which suggests that he was to receive at least a certain amount of training pertaining to the mechanics and propulsion of a vessel.



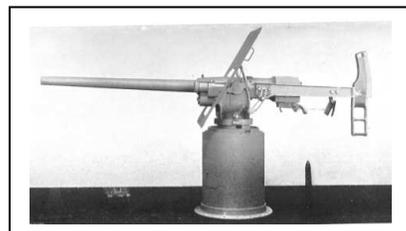
Among the many vessels serving in the war-time Royal Navy was a goodly number of requisitioned smaller craft such as drifters and trawlers. It was to these ships that many of the Newfoundland sailors were attached – often an addition to the ship's civilian crew who had volunteered to join the Navy and stayed with their ship - as it was felt that their experience in small craft might be put to good use there.

It was to the armed trawler *White Ear* that Seaman Gosse was dispatched on March 25-26 after having spent a month at *Vivid II*. It would appear that at the time the ship was based in the North Sea town and harbour of Yarmouth* on the Norfolk coast.



**The town had been bombarded by the Imperial German Navy in November of 1914 and was later to be subjected to air raids.*

(Right above: *Armed drifters, smaller than trawlers, entering Yarmouth Harbour after a mine-sweeping operation – photograph from Fishermen in WW1 on the Fishing News web-site*)



White Ear was a hired trawler of just under two-hundred tons which had been built in 1914 and registered in the not-distant fishing-port of Hull. Converted for use as a mine-sweeper and equipped with a six-pounder gun, she went into service with the Royal Navy on October of 1914.

(Right above: *A Quick-Firing Hotchkiss 6 pounder gun such as would had been mounted on the fore-deck of the trawler ‘White Ear’ – from Wikipedia*)

Seaman Gosse was to serve for only sixteen days on board *White Ear* before he was transferred on April 11-12 to another armed fishing-ship converted for use as a minesweeper, His Majesty’s Trawler *Miura*, which had also been equipped with a gun – as seen on its fore-deck -, in this case a three-pounder and possibly also a *Hotchkiss*.



(Right above: *The hired trawler ‘Miura’ of two-hundred fifty tons and built in 1911 is seen here on duty in the North Sea. She was to go into service in February of 1915 and was lost some six months later. – photograph from the Wreck Site web-site via Google*)



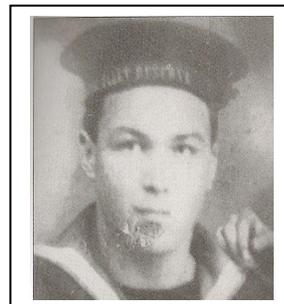
(Right above: *A photographic example of the aforesaid Hotchkiss 3 pounder gun as possibly mounted on ‘Miura’ – from Wikipedia*)

(Right: *Minelaying from a German surface vessel during the Great War: these were for the most part contact mines. – from the NavWeaps web-site*)



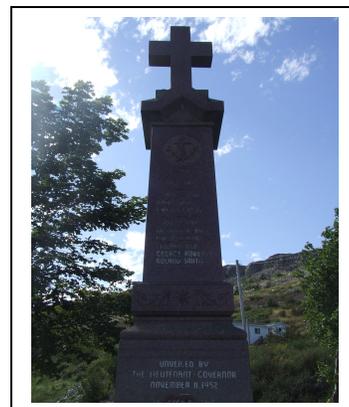
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The ship's log of His Majesty's Trawler *Miura* not being available, understandably, there is little information to be gleaned of the ship's last patrol. On Monday, August 23 of 1915, she was mine-sweeping in the North Sea, perhaps using the rather primitive method of destroying mines by rifle fire. Whether the concussion of an exploding mine detonated another closer to the vessel or whether *Miura* came into physical contact with one of them appears not to be known – nor of course was there any survivor to tell the tale.



All eleven crew-members were lost, Seaman Gosse the only Newfoundlander among them.

(Right above: *The photograph of Seaman Gosse is from the Canadian Virtual War Memorial, Veterans' Affairs Canada. His cap shows him to have been a sailor of the 'Fleet Reserve' at the time of the photograph, which may have been while he was posted to HMS Vivid II.*)



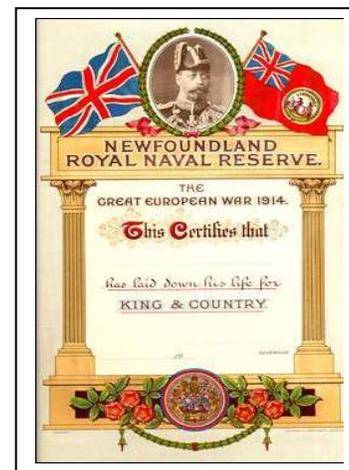
The son of Peter Gosse, former fisherman deceased in Tilton of nephritis on January 8, 1917, and of Elizabeth Gosse (née Gosse* (sic)), he was brother to Emily, Rose, Violet, Isabella, Bertha, Richard and Peter**.

**The couple was married in Bay Roberts on May 19, 1898.*

***This appears to be the only couple which meets the criteria of names, places and dates although admittedly, not the one of Seaman Gosse's reported age in which case there may be other data that the author has yet to discover. The above conclusions may therefore be somewhat unreliable.*

(Right above: *The sacrifice of Seaman Walter Gosse is honoured on the War Memorial which stands in Spaniard's Bay. – photograph from 2011(?)*)

Seaman Gosse is recorded as having *drowned* on August 23 of 1915 at the *reported* age of twenty-one years. Thus far the exact date of his birth has proved to be elusive (but also see ** above) – and if the above is correct then he was a lot younger than has been supposed.



(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*)

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Seaman Gosse 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 Walter Gosse was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, to the British War Medal (centre) and 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.