

HISCOCK



Seaman John Hiscock, Number 1764x, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on a bronze beneath the Caribou at the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

Having relinquished his occupation as a fisherman, John Hiscock *answered the call* of the naval authorities for volunteers and travelled from Northern Bight (or more precisely, Hickman's Harbour), Random Island, Trinity Bay, to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on May 7 of 1915, he reported...*to duty*...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that May 7 he enlisted for the first time into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for a single year's war-time service\* and then underwent a satisfactory medical assessment on the morrow. He also likely attested at this time, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V.

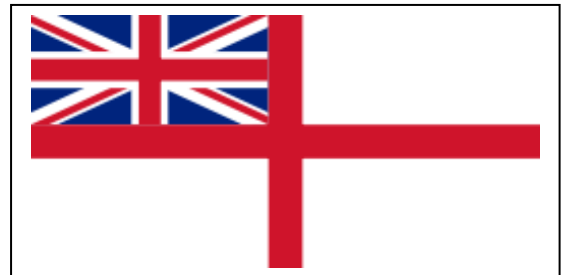
(Right: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India: as a boy and young man he had served in the Royal Navy from 1877 until 1891 and always retained a fondness for the Senior Service. – The photograph of the King in the uniform of an Admiral of the Fleet is from the Royal Collection Trust web-site and taken in 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.**



**A branch of the senior service from Britain's oldest colony. Naval reservists before leaving Newfoundland to serve in the Empire's cause.**

**(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, 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-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)**

**Seaman Hiscock's scant personal file suggests him leaving for service overseas on or about May 29, three weeks and a day following his enlistment. However, the Discharge Register of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) suggests that Seaman John Hiscock was to board the armed merchant cruiser HMS *Calgarian* in St. John's Harbour as one of a draft of eighty-five reservists, on the twentieth day of that June\* - the vessel's log-book says it was on the seventeenth - and in the company of the two-hundred forty-two men and officers of 'F' Company of the Newfoundland Regiment on its way to Scotland.**

**(Right: The photograph of Newfoundland military personnel in tenders on their way to board 'Calgarian' is from the Provincial Archives. 'Calgarian' was not a requisitioned troop transport but in September of 1914 had been taken over by the British government to serve as an armed merchant-cruiser. She did, however, as on this occasion, at times carry troops and civilian passengers across the Atlantic. She was later torpedoed and sunk by U-19 off the north of Ireland on March 1, 1918.)**



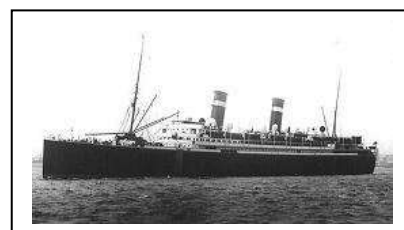
**\*Apparently the ship took nineteen days to make what was usually the journey of about a week. Not only was 'Calgarian' escorting three submarines, but she sailed by way of the Portuguese Azores and then Gibraltar – some of the Newfoundlanders apparently even having the time to cross the straits to spend a few hours in North Africa. She reached Liverpool on July 9.**



**(Right above: The British Crown Colony of Gibraltar in pre-Great War days: The Spanish mainland is in the background beyond the harbour and Royal Navy dockyard. – from a vintage postcard)**

**HMS Calgarian and her trans-Atlantic crossing of June 20 to July 9, 1915...**

**The armed merchant cruiser HMS 'Calgarian' arrived in St. John's Harbour from Halifax at about six o'clock in the morning of June 17, anchored and almost immediately began coaling. Her log suggests that she had sailed alone rather than in the company of the submarines (see below) since at times 'Calgarian' had been doing sixteen knots and the submarines' top speed was only thirteen.**



**(Right above: The photograph of the SS 'Calgarian' is from the [naval-history.net](http://naval-history.net) web-site.)**

**At about five-fifteen of that same evening of June 17 the personnel of 'F' Company of the Newfoundland Regiment came on board as well as eighty-seven naval reservists and a single petty officer.**

**June 18 was to be spent transferring stores to HMS 'Calgarian' and completing the coaling of the ship. On this day is first mentioned the SS 'Glenalmond', a smaller cargo ship which was to accompany 'Calgarian' across the Atlantic to Gibraltar, the vessel from which some of the above-mentioned stores were to be drawn, and on which a small detachment of eight naval reservists and some few more senior ranks were to travel.**

**Also noted for the first time in the log of that June 18 was one – the vessel H2 - of the apparently four submarines – 'H1', 'H2', 'H3' and 'H4' - which were to be escorted across the ocean. They had presumably already made the journey from Montreal where they had been built to St. John's where they had been awaiting 'Calgarian'. Where exactly the SS 'Glenalmond' fits into the picture is not clear unless she was the submarines' depot ship or acting as an ocean-going tug.**

**Calgarian sailed out of St. John's Harbour at ten minutes past ten on the morning of June 20, 1915, at a speed of ten – then lowered to eight – knots. This had surely been to allow the submarines, otherwise un-mentioned, to keep pace with the larger vessel.**

**Proceeding at a reduced rate of speed, often about eight and a half knots, it was not until the afternoon of June 26 that the small convoy of HMS 'Calgarian', SS 'Glenalmond' and the four small submarines reached 'Flores Island' in the Portuguese Azores. During those**

days 'Calgarian' had been towing Submarine 'H3', at times its crew being required to repair a ruptured or slipped towline.

The remainder of the afternoon and early evening was spent anchored off 'Flores Island' with the submarines in turn drawing alongside to take on fuel (diesel oil) and supplies. It was a task soon accomplished and – after 'H3's towing-line had once more been repaired – the ships were on their way again at a speed of nine knots just after ten o'clock on that same evening of June 26.



(Right above: 'Delgado Point' on 'Flores Island', close to where the convoy anchored, and then past which it sailed on June 26, 1915 – photograph the cruisemapper.com)

It was not to be until the late morning of July 3 that they arrived at the British possession of Gibraltar situated at the narrow entrance to the Mediterranean Sea. This was to be where HMS 'Calgarian' would part ways with 'Glenalmond' – her eight naval reservists and five higher ranks to transfer immediately to 'Calgarian'\*

\*The four submarines were now to enter the Mediterranean Sea and proceed to the island of Malta from where they were to operate for the remainder of the Great War – except for H3 which would strike a mine a year later, on July 15, 1916, and be lost with all on board.



(Right: The photograph of 'H4' in Brindisi Harbour in August of 1916 is from Wikipedia.)

Two days only were spent in Gibraltar although a number of those on board were able to leave the ship for 'liberty' on July 4. On July 5, having taken on board coal, supplies and a number of German prisoners-of-war, the ship sailed at eight o'clock in the evening and for the first time in some two weeks was able to proceed at a speed greater than ten knots. She was now en route to Liverpool.

There she arrived without incident of July 9 and at ten minutes past eight of the following morning, HMS 'Calgarian's record-keeper documented... "Clypso" (sic) Boys left ship.

(The above has been adapted from the log-book of the armed merchant cruiser HMS 'Calgarian' for the period of June 13, 1915, to July 9, 1915.)

On July 10 of that 1916, Calgarian having docked in Liverpool, the Naval Reserve personnel would thereupon have been either posted directly to a ship or ordered to undergo further training – or to simply wait - at one of various Royal Navy establishments – these for the most part operating around the coast of England.

In the case of Seaman Hiscock, not immediately attached to a vessel, HMS Victory I (see below) was the posting to which he was directed and where he was apparently to remain

until November 22 of that same year – although what his occupations were to be during this time is unclear.

*HMS ‘Victory’, like most of the so-called stone-frigates (naval establishments on shore), was three entities: it was a training establishment originally, and also a holding-barracks for seamen not only in training but awaiting a posting to one of His Majesty’s ships, its facilities initially set in the naval city and port of Portsmouth\*; thirdly, it was also the ship to which the majority of the land-based personnel would have been, at least officially and bureaucratically – if not physically - attached\*\*. At Portsmouth this vessel was HMS ‘Victory’, the warship from which Admiral Nelson had directed the Battle of Trafalgar – although her illustrious history is not limited to that one single incident.*



*\*The large influx of personnel due to the War necessitated further Divisions and functions being transferred to other areas of the United Kingdom.*

*(Right above: HMS ‘Victory’ in dry dock in the southern English port-city of Portsmouth where she has been for a century – photograph from Wikipedia)*

*\*\*Naval discipline differed in some ways from civil and even Army law, and those in naval uniform, even though based on land and perhaps never to go to sea, had to be on the books of a real ship for that discipline to be applied. Thus a normally small and obsolescent vessel was used for this purely bureaucratic purpose.*

Having passed some one-hundred four days at *Victory I*, Seaman Hiscock Hiscock was ordered dispatched to service on one of the Royal Navy’s more modern capital ships: *HMS Invincible*.

*(Right below: The photograph of ‘Invincible’ is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. The idea of a battleship with the speed of a cruiser gave birth to the British battle-cruisers, an original idea perhaps, but while keeping the large twelve- and fifteen-inch guns (and sometimes larger) it meant sacrificing much of the heavy armour plating which protected it.*



*This plus a few critical design flaws and perhaps complacency and negligence saw three of these ships destroyed by magazine explosions during the Battle of Jutland (see below), and a fourth, HMS ‘Hood’, suffered the same consequences in May of 1941 – from ‘Hood’ there were only three or four survivors.)*

A vessel of some seventeen-thousand tons, she had been launched on April 13 of 1907. Able to attain a top speed of more than twenty-five knots (forty-eight kilometres per hour), she was armed with eight twelve-inch guns, sixteen four-inch weapons, a single anti-aircraft gun and four torpedo-tubes. Her armour ranged from a thickness of seven inches

protecting the guns, six on the sides of the ship and two inches covering the deck – quite a lot: yet it would prove to be too little.

The vessel's log books for most of 1915 and then 1916 appear not to be available, but other sources suggest that when Seaman John Hiscock joined her on that November 23, 1915, she was likely in the Scottish naval port of Rosyth.

(Right below: *Other capital ships of the Royal Navy seen here in 1914 – photograph from Wikipedia*)

By that time '*Invincible*' had been involved in action in August of 1914 in the North Sea and later, in December, in the South Atlantic at the *Battle of the Falklands* where she had assisted in the destruction of the German armoured cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*. 1915 would be partially spent in re-fitting but there had reportedly been no further encounter with the enemy during that year.



In March of 1916 *Invincible* was joined by her sister-ships *Inflexible* and *Indomitable* to form the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battle-Cruiser Squadron after which all three were transferred to the Base of the Grand Fleet at *Scapa Flow* in the Orkney Islands to the north of Scotland. There they were to undertake gunnery practice in May and await events - which were not to be long in coming to pass.

The only full-scale confrontation of the British and German fleets during the *Great War* was to take place at the end of that May, 1916, off the western coast off Denmark, the *Jutland Peninsula* – to the Germans it was the *Skagerrakschlacht*, the *Skagerrak* being the entrance to the Baltic Sea, to the British the *Battle of Jutland*.

Suffice to say that the conflict was indecisive: the British lost more ships and more men but the German High Fleet withdrew to its ports where it remained for the remainder of the *Great War*. Both sides of course claimed victory.

As for *Invincible* with Seaman John Hiscock on board, she...engaged light cruisers of the German 2nd Scouting Group at 10,000yds. Although her fire disabled the *Wiesbaden* and *Pillau* and then inflicted two serious hits on the battlecruiser '*Lutzow*', her target, the '*Derfflinger*' scored five hits on her. The last shell blew the roof off Q-turret and set fire to the cordite propellant. The flash quickly reached the magazine and the '*Invincible*' was blown in half by a massive explosion)\*.



All but six of her complement were lost, including the Admiral. (from Conway's *All the World's Fighting Ships 1906-21* via [naval-history.net](http://naval-history.net))

(continued)

*\*HMS 'Indomitable' was also lost as was HMS 'Queen Mary', both battle-cruisers and each with a crew of over one-thousand. There were just two survivors from the first and nine from the second.*

*(Preceding page: The remains of HMS 'Invincible', the fore and aft sections, still afloat and visible some twenty-four hours after the action – from Wikipedia)*

*HISCOCK, John, Seaman, Newfoundland RNR, X 1764, 'Invincible', 31 May 1916, Jutland, ship lost (from Royal Navy records)*

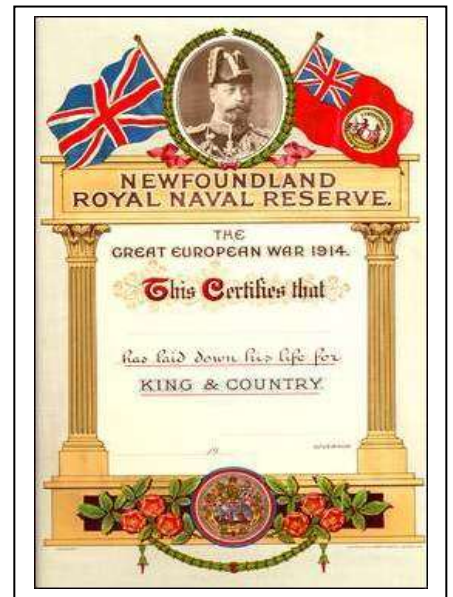
The son of William Hiscock, fisherman, and of Amelia Hiscock (née *Baker*) of Hickman's Harbour – perhaps later Northern Arm, this recorded by Seaman Hiscock himself – he was brother to Sarah and half-brother to Naomi and to Effie-P\*.

His mother had apparently died when he was young and this father had married again, on this second occasion in 1908 to widow Julia Jane Baker\* – the couple were to have two children as named above.

*(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)*

*\*Some of the above material is from an article a propos Seaman John Hiscock compiled by the Southwest Arm Historical Society and found on their web-site.*

Seaman John Hiscock was recorded as having been...*killed in action...*on May 31 of 1916 at the *apparent* age of twenty years: date of birth in Hickman's Harbour, Newfoundland, recorded on his enlistment papers and from a family source, March 2, 1896, although this may not be correct as his sister Sarah appears to have been born on July 6 of the same year - according to a copy of Newfoundland Vital Statistics.



*Seaman Hiscock 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 John Hiscock was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as 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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 21, 2023.