



Seaman Edward Moses Hulan, Number 1645x, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the Naval Reserve Bronze beneath the Caribou at the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

Having decided to answer the call of the naval authorities for volunteers and having relinquished his likely occupation of fisherman in the west coast community of Middle Barachois, he thereupon travelled from there to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on February 6 of 1915, Edward Moses Hulan reported...to duty...on the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).



On that same early-February day 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 underwent a satisfactory medical assessment two days afterwards, on February 8. 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 as 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, 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 by the Royal Navy in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)

Apparently a mere seven days* after having first reported to Calypso in St. John's, on February 13 Seaman Hulan was to depart from St. John's to cross the Atlantic – or so his service file suggests. In fact, it appears to have been a little more complicated than that.

Several days prior, on February 4, the detachment of volunteers for the Army that upon its arrival at Edinburgh Castle was to become 'C' Company of the Newfoundland contingent in the United Kingdom, had boarded the tender Neptune in St. John's Harbour for the short journey down the coast to Bay Bulls. There the ocean-going vessel Dominion awaited to carry it across the Atlantic and the documents of some Reservists, also citing February 4, might suggest that they were to be a part of that contingent.



(Right above: The photograph of personnel of 'C' Company on board the 'Neptune' on the way to the harbour at Bay Bulls is from the Provincial Archives.)

(continued)

Other available sources do not, however, record any of those last-mentioned naval reservists having taken passage on *Dominion*. In fact, *Calypso*'s drill register of the time records that the naval draft of the time, including Seaman Hulan, was to leave St. John's on board the *Allan Line* vessel, the SS *Mongolian*, on February 17 – although the ship's captain records (see below) that it was the 18th.

The situation seems to have been even a bit more convoluted than that: Days before, according to the local newspapers, on that above-mentioned February 4-5, *Mongolian* had left St. John's in an attempt to force a passage through the heavy ice surrounding the entrance to St. John's and extending well offshore. It was to no avail and after three days of futile effort the ship was to return to port.

In re-entering St. John's Harbour, however, the vessel had struck a rock and, after inspection, it was decided necessary to do emergency repairs in the local dock. In the meantime some of the vessel's passengers, but not the Reservists, were to take the train across the island so as to catch another ship in Halifax.

On or about February 23, the repairs having been completed, *Mongolian* departed Newfoundland once again, only to be immediately met with heavy seas which eventually were to at least partially undo much of the temporary work which had been completed to the ship only days before.

The following is an adaption of a letter written by *Mongolian*'s captain after his ship had reached the safety of the harbour of Halifax on February 25. It was addressed to Lieutenant-Commander McDonnell of HMS *Calypso* who saw fit to forward it to the Office of the Colonial Secretary – whence it made its way to the local press.

Dear Sir:-

It is but just that I submit the following to your notice.

As you are aware, the ship under my command left St. John's 18th February with 200 R.N.R. ratings from your ship under the command of Captain Alan Goodridge. On their arrival on board '*Mongolian*' Captain Goodridge at once established regular discipline and routine.

Shortly after leaving port rough and foggy weather was encountered and as ship proceeded East this weather became worse each day. On 22nd and 23rd a heavy gale raged from North-East with very high seas, causing the ship to labour considerably. On the latter date trouble arose through the giving-out of temporary repairs done in St. John's. Considerable water was found making its way into the fore end of the ship. After consultation I decided to return here to Halifax.

I requested Captain Goodridge with ratings under his command to assist me in every way consistent with requirements. It is needless to say such help was given in the most energetic and cheerful manner by way of preparing for any emergency. Manning deck

pumps (which were kept going day and night until arrival into port). Also a number of men were detailed to assist in the engine room and stokehold. (Chief Engineer Brown of this ship desires me to specially mention the valuable assistance of these men.

For my part I cannot speak too highly of Captain Goodridge. His cheerful and composed manner throughout went far to inspire confidence not only in the men under his command but also the passengers entrusted to my care.

I would request, Sir, that you would be good enough to forward to His Excellency the Governor my appreciation for the assistance so ably rendered by him. I would also ask you to place on record my high opinion of Petty Officer George Gill and Armourer Luxon.

The entire staff of my ship join with me in thanking the men of the Newfoundland Reserve whose conduct throughout was most exemplary and helpful in every way.

I may say that almost immediately upon arrival here the men were transferred to the SS 'Scandinavian' and sailed about 9 p.m..

J.W. Hatherly
Master S.S. Mongolian

(Right: The SS 'Mongolian' was an elderly vessel constructed in 1891. Built for the Allan Line Company she was to have served as a troopship during the Boer War before being bought by the British Admiralty, again for war service, in 1914 or 1915. She was not to survive the conflict: on July 21 of 1918 she was torpedoed and sunk by U-boat 70 with a loss of thirty-five lives. – The photograph of Mongolian is from the British Home Child Group International web-site.)



SS Mongolian

Once having disembarked from *Scandinavian* - on which they had journeyed from Halifax (see in letter above) - in the United Kingdom in early March, 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 in England. In the case of Seaman Hulan, the destination was to be the Royal Navy's Gunnery School, HMS *Excellent*, on Whale Island facing the entrance to the harbour of Portsmouth on England's south coast.

***HMS 'Excellent' was the name of the Royal Navy's Gunnery School which had been established in a ship of the same name in 1829, the vessel being permanently moored just outside Portsmouth dockyard. As the years passed the ships were replaced, but were in turn to become HMS 'Excellent'.**



(Preceding page: Recruits at drill on a naval gun on 'Whale Island' during the early period of the Great War – from Wikipedia)

And also as the years passed, the use evolved of the nearby 'Whale (originally 'Whaley') Island' as facilities were constructed on it. In 1885 the Gunnery School was moved from the ship of the time to be re-established on the island itself.

It was a move which was to complicate things administratively.

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 sailors were serving on land at a 'stone-frigate', as these land-based facilities came to be known.

Thus the use of elderly and obsolescent vessels that plied the waters adjacent to the many naval land establishments were in theory the home ships of the tens, hundreds, even thousands of men who laboured ashore in naval uniform – and who often were never to set foot on the ship in question.

(Right: The Royal Navy Memorial stands on the coast at Portsmouth from where may be seen 'Whale Island' – photograph from 1917)



Which is why Seaman Hulan would have then worn an HMS 'Excellent' cap-band.

Seaman Hulan was to remain for some five weeks at HMS *Excellent* before being transferred on April 13 of that same year across the way to another naval establishment, HMS *Victory II* – there were at least nine different Divisions of *Victory* – although not every source appears to agree where exactly *Victory II* was or what its function was.

It is certain that *Victory II* amongst other things was a training establishment for stokers – most of the Royal Navy's ships were at the time powered by coal, with oil only becoming more common as the *Great War* progressed – and for those others who were to work in the ships' engine room*. But apparently *Victory II* also looked after the financial accounting for the numerous ships that were based in Portsmouth, and she may also have been responsible for the training of a Royal Navy Division – sailors who had no ship or who were otherwise superfluous to needs were often ordered to serve as infantry in one of the eventual twelve battalions of the Royal Navy Division.

**All of these men were already trained seamen.*

And at some time during 1915, at least some of the activities of *Victory II* were transferred to London to the area of *Crystal Palace* where it remained until the end of the conflict. However, a number of sources persist in saying that stokers and engine-room personnel continued at least partially to be trained at Portsmouth...

...and this may well have been the lot of Seaman-Gunner Hulan for three weeks, from April 14 to May 6 on which latter date he was removed from the nominal roll of *Victory II* and dispatched to HMS *Ilex* to be taken onto its strength on the morrow, May 7.

There is not a great deal of information about HMS *Ilex* to be gleaned from the sources which appear to be available. She was a yacht of some one-hundred twenty tons which, built in 1896, was to be requisitioned, re-fitted, armed with two three-pounder quick-firing guns, and put into hired service during the first year of the *Great War* from mid-September of 1914 until July 7 of 1915.

The only other available detail of HMS *Ilex* seems to be that found in the *naval-history.net* source which reports...*May have served as wireless-equipped A/P Group Leader or in special yacht squadrons, at home or in Mediterranean**.

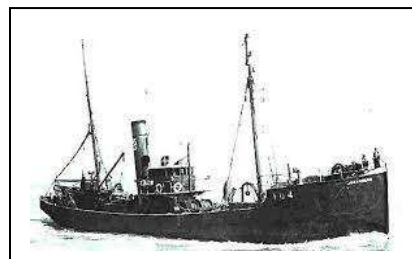
**A recent find suggests that perhaps she was based at Queenstown (today Cobh in the Republic of Ireland) where she was responsible for a flotilla of smaller craft such as Sea Searcher (below).*

But how he was to spend this period of eight weeks less two days or what Seaman Hulan's duties were to be is not at all clear as a second vessel is found named at this time in his service record: this was the hired trawler *Sea Searcher* which had been a boat of the fishing-fleet sailing out of the east-coast port of Hull until a six-pounder weapon had been fastened to her fore-deck and she had begun war-time service in March of 1915 as a mine-sweeper and escort vessel.



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

(Right: *The image of a vessel similar to 'Sea Searcher' (see below), the trawler 'Dagon' in peace-time, is from the maritimearchaeologytrust web-site via Google.*)



His term with HMS *Ilex* and with HMT *Sea Searcher* having terminated – at least officially – on June 30 of that year of 1915, Seaman Hulan then found himself transferred to two more hired yachts in succession: HMS *Boadicea II* – the parent vessel for the base at Kingstown (today Dun Laoghaire in the outskirts of Dublin) from the first day of July until the last before being attached to HMS *Amethyst* – the parent ship for the base on the Welsh coast at Holyhead - on August 1.

How or if these two last ships differed from the first above-named hired yacht, HMS *Ilex*, apart from the size of the gun installed on each, has proved difficult to ascertain. All three are described in a similar fashion by the *naval-history.net* source, not that it matters a great deal: their duties and responsibilities as A/P (*Auxiliary Patrol*) leaders would have been certainly much the same.

In fact, one ship appears to be missing altogether from the records: His Majesty's Trawler *Merse* on which he was to die. *Merse* was a fishing boat, built in 1914, to be requisitioned and hired by the British Admiralty not long afterwards. She weighed almost three-hundred tons which may account for her being able to be fitted with a twelve-pounder, twelve cwt naval gun.

She was to go into war-time service in February of 1915 although there appears to be no record of either when or where it was that Seaman Hulan – attached to HMS *Amethyst* by then* - joined her crew.

During the War, 1456 trawlers were requisitioned from ports around the British Isles and even elsewhere of which two-hundred sixty-four were to be lost.

(Right: A quick-firing naval twelve-pounder (the weight of the shell) and twelve hundred-weight (1200 lbs. the weight of the barrel and breech) gun such as found on HMT 'Merse', here seen adapted for use in 1941. – taken at the Royal Artillery Museum 'Firepower', Woolwich, in 2010)



**HMS 'Amethyst' was the parent ship to a flotilla of smaller vessels such as 'Merse' and was thus responsible for such things as fuelling, stores, ammunition, personnel, crew payment etc. for her brood. She was stationed at the small Welsh port of Holyhead on the Isle of Anglesey.*

This final chapter of Seaman Hulan's story begins in September of 1916 with the launching of the new super-Dreadnought battleship HMS *Ramillies*, an occasion on which she cracked her hull and damaged her primary rudder.

Even though *Ramillies* had been constructed at Dalmuir on the River Clyde, she was apparently too large to be repaired there and it was decided that she be towed south to Liverpool. However, as she was deemed to be unseaworthy, it was decided to make temporary repairs – and some structural changes – in the *Beardsmore Yard*, her birthplace in Scotland, before the tow could be undertaken.



(Right above: Eventually to weigh some thirty-thousand tons, she was launched in 1916, too late to participate in the Battle of Jutland. The ship was initially armed with eight fifteen-inch, fourteen six-inch and two three-inch guns as well as four torpedo-tubes, an armament some of which was to be changed in later years as the danger from the skies became more and more apparent. She was still in service during the Second World War and involved in the D-Day landings in Normandy and their aftermath. Her career terminated in 1948. – the photograph is from the Wikipedia web-site.)

It was not to be until May 7 of 1917 that the battleship was ready to be moved. The author of this present dossier has been fortunate enough to find an eye-witness account* of the circumstances leading up to and of the destruction of His Majesty's Trawler *Merse*, and what follows is a condensed version of those events.

****North Sea Diary. 1914 – 1918 – by Commander Sir Stephen King-Hall (Pickle Printers Publishing, 2015.***

On May 7, 1917, HMS *Ramillies* left the *Beardsmore* premises in Dalmuir and entered the River Clyde accompanied by six tug-boats. As the battleship moved slowly down-river, she became uncontrollable and grounded twice. The convoy halted to spend the night – eventually three nights – anchored off the town and harbour of Greenock.

On May 10, the next attempt was made. Four tugs and *Ramillies*, escorted by four destroyers and mine-sweepers moved further towards the open sea. Once again the battleship proved unmanageable and struck two accompanying trawlers albeit not seriously. It was thus decided to return to the shelter of the River Clyde.

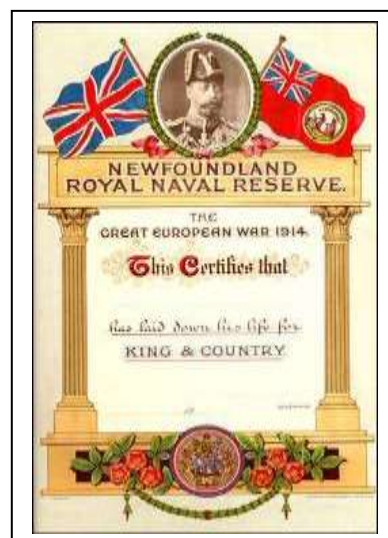
There now ensued three days of discussion from May 11 to 14, a conference prolonged by the comings and goings of a number of specialists until May 22 - although the author of the Diary – and eye-witness to the events - records the date as May 23.

With HMS *Ramillies* promising to be as reluctant as ever to co-operate, the procession, by then comprising not only the thirty-thousand ton capital ship but also eight mine-sweepers, eight tug-boats, eight armed-trawlers and six destroyers, was once more on its way to Liverpool. But from where this armada of small ships was to come is not recorded except, of course, Seaman Hulan's *Merse* from Holyhead.

What now follows is verbatim from the *North Sea Diary*: *We successfully managed the gate entrance, and slowly went down river. At 1 pm we passed the 'Cumbraes Light', and at 2: 30 pm, about six miles further on, the trawler 'Merse', one of our inner screen, when distant about a mile on our port bow, struck a mine and was blown to atoms. There was a large cloud of white and grey smoke, a report, and in a few second this cleared away and there was nothing except an oily patch and a few pieces of wood....There were no survivors of the crew of 15...*

Two days later the convoy limped into port at Liverpool.

(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)



The son of George Frederick Hulan (also found as *Huelin* and later as *Whalen*) and of Rosanna Hulan, he was brother to Julius-Elwin, Lill, Alfred-Job, Mary-Ellen (also found as *Helen*), Cyril-H., Wlilfred-N., Alice-May and to adopted George-Cyrus.

Edward Moses Hulan died at the *reported* age of twenty-three years in the sinking of the trawler *Merse* off Garroch Head, Bute, as reported above: date of birth in Middle Barachois, District of St. George, Newfoundland, July 1-2, 1894 (from his enlistment papers and from Newfoundland Vital Statistics) but the year also given as 1896 in the 1911 Census.

(continued)

Seaman Hulan 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-Gunner Edward Moses Hulan was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, to the British War Medal (centre) 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 21, 2023.