



Leading Seaman George Hubert Miller, Number 1727x, 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, George Hubert Miller *answered the call* of the naval authorities for volunteers and travelled from his residence at Spaniard's Cove, Trinity Bay, to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on February 19 of 1915, he reported...*to duty*...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that February 19 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.

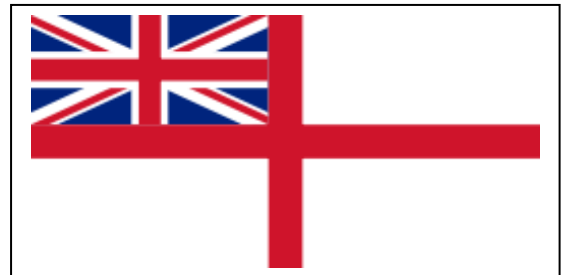
(Right: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India: as a boy and young man he had served in the Royal Navy from 1877 until 1891 and always retained a fondness for the Senior Service. – The photograph of the King 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: 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 of her by the Royal Navy in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)

Seaman Miller's scant personal file – as of March 19 showing him to no longer be simply a Seaman Recruit - suggests him leaving for service overseas on or about May 29, ninety-nine days following his enlistment*. However, the Discharge Register of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) records that he, Seaman Miller, as one of a detachment of just eight Reservists, was to board the small merchant vessel *Glenalmond* which at the time was escorting the armed merchant cruiser HMS *Calgarian* arrived in St. John's Harbour, this ship itself to embark eighty-five Reservists on the reported twentieth day of that June - it was in fact to be the seventeenth. *Calgarian* was also to take on the two-hundred forty-two men and officers of 'F' Company of the Newfoundland Regiment on its way to Scotland.

***Calgarian* and *Glenalmond* were then to cross as far as Gibraltar in tandem (see below).**

***The Naval Reserve Discharge Register on HMS 'Calypso' appears to suggest that Seaman Miller may have been originally destined to leave St. John's for the United Kingdom via Halifax on board the SS 'Stephano' in the month of March, but his personal Service Record shows otherwise.**

(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.)



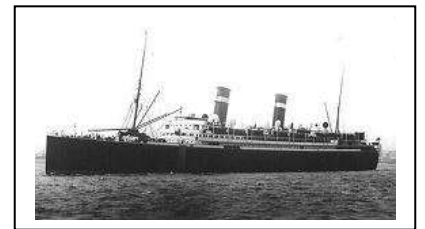
Apparently the ships took nineteen days to make what was usually the journey of about a week. Not only was 'Calgarian' escorting three submarines, but she sailed by way of the Portuguese Azores and then Gibraltar – some of the Newfoundlanders apparently even having the time to cross the straits to spend 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)

The story follows of HMS Calgarian and her trans-Atlantic crossing of June 20 to July 9, 1915... (Adapted from Calgarian's log-book; that of Glenalmond is not available.)

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 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 in her log 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 the small afore-mentioned 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 and had accompanied them from Montreal.

'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 broken 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 the convoy 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'.**

***'Glenalmond' was to be torpedoed by a U-boat on April 9 of 1916 off the west coast of Brittany. While the ship was lost, all of her crew survived.**

****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.

(As seen above, the above has been adapted solely 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 Miller, not immediately attached to a vessel, *Victory I* (see below) was the posting to which he was directed and where he was to remain until mid-August of that same year, although what his occupations were to be during this time – apart from awaiting a posting - 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 five weeks at *Victory I*, Seaman Miller was ordered dispatched to service at the Royal Navy Gunnery School on the nearby *Whale Island: HMS Excellent**, from where on a fine day Portsmouth Harbour may be seen. He was there to remain on the books for nine months – from August 14, 1915, until May 12 of 1916.

(continued)

****HMS 'Excellent' was the name – and also still is 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 to be replaced, but each in turn was to be named HMS 'Excellent'.***



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

And 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.

(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 Miller would, after *Victory I*, have worn an HMS *Excellent* cap-band. Subsequently, all those months later – it was possibly during this period that he was promoted to the rank of (acting) leading seaman - he was to be transferred to a further Royal Navy land-based establishment, *President III*.

This Royal Navy establishment had initially been in London where the original – floating – *President* had been opened to serve as a drill-ship for recruits of the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve. *President III*, one of several Divisions to emerge as the *Great War* progressed, was to deal primarily with finances and accountancy, its offices at times located outside the capital city.

However, while it is unlikely that (Acting) Seaman Miller was to become involved with accounting, it would appear that neither was he to become involved with shipping, at least at the outset. His personal file may suggest that he was granted a period of furlough to Newfoundland at some time during that year of 1917, but there appears to be no evidence of this – although it cannot be entirely dismissed.

Then at some time, perhaps as of October 31, 1917, (Acting) Leading Seaman George Miller was ordered attached to the SS *Halifax*, a small steamer that before the War had sailed commercially to and from Prince Edward Island and the Eastern Seaboard of the United States as well as venturing as a cruise ship to the Caribbean in the early years of the twentieth century. With the advent of hostilities came a decline in business and she had been bought by some neutral American investors.



(Right above: The image of the SS 'Halifax', seen here as she enters the port of Canso, is from the sailstrait.wordpress.com web-site.)

There are few if any details a propos the demise of the SS *Halifax*: the ship left New York in early December, 1917, to sail to the French port of Bordeaux with an unknown cargo. En route she put into port at San Miguel, the main island of the Portuguese Azores archipelago, which she then quit on December 11. After that she disappeared...

(Right: *The photograph of Seaman George Hubert Miller taken while serving on HMS 'Calypso' by Holloway Studios is shown by courtesy of the Provincial Archives at The Rooms.*)

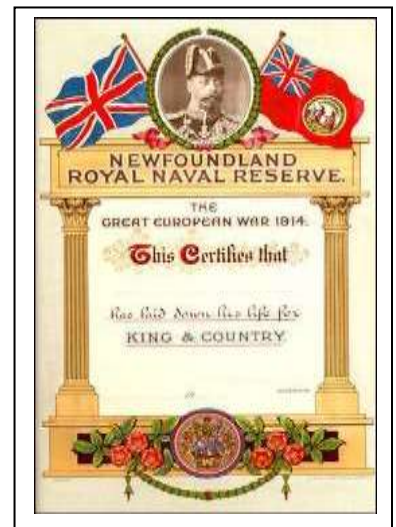


The conventions of the sea for the most part agree that those *missing at sea* are considered to have died on the date when the vessel in question was last seen or contacted. The author has yet to find evidence of the continued existence of the SS *Halifax* on a date anterior to that last-reported December 11 – which does not mean that none exists.

The son of William Alfred Miller, former fisherman deceased...*at sea*...on September 18, 1907, and of Jane Miller (née *Morris*), of Spaniard's Bay (also found as Spaniard's Cove), Trinity Bay, he was also brother to John-Ryall, James-Morris, Aquila, Benjamin, Elizabeth and to William.

**The couple was married in the community of Trouty, Trinity Bay, on April 27, 1892. After her husband's death, Jane was to re-marry, to Eli James in Spaniard's Cove on December 26 of 1911.*

(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*)



Leading Seaman Miller was recorded as...*presumed drowned*...in the sinking of the SS *Halifax* on December 12 of 1917 at the reported age of twenty-one years: Date of birth of George Hubert Miller (not George F. Miller as has the *naval-history.net* web-site) at Spaniard's Cove, Trinity Bay, Newfoundland, November 27, 1896 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register and also his enlistment papers).

Leading Seaman Miller 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.

Leading Seaman George Hubert Miller was entitled 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.