

MUGFORD, J.



Seaman Jacob Mugford, Service Number 531x, 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), Jacob Mugford had initially 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' part-time service and Jacob Mugford was to undergo the required annual training of at least twenty-eight days on six interspersed occasions during the following sixty-six months. The months of February and March of 1914 would see his final term of training on *Calypso*, some four months before events were to intervene and he was to be called to war-time service.

Summoned from home *to service* just prior to the onset of hostilities, Jacob Mugford relinquished his job as a labourer with *Bishop and Sons Limited* and left his family residence on Spencer Street in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland on August 3, 1914.

(continued)



On that day before the British *Declaration of War* – Jacob Mugford was once again to report...*to duty*...to the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that early-August day, Jacob Mugford was signed on for wartime service* and it was also likely to have been at this time – if he had not already done so - that he 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)

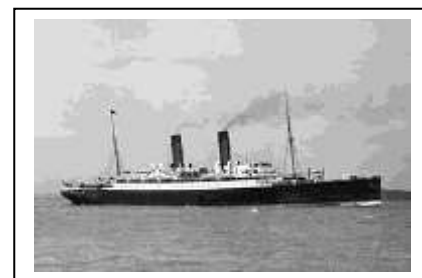
Following some three months of duties in St. John's – no further training has been recorded - Seaman Mugford, one of a draft of three-hundred five Naval Reservists, embarked on November 5-6 onto the *Cunard* ocean-liner *Franconia* on the British-bound journey of its commercial route between New York and Liverpool.



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

Once having arrived in the port-city of Liverpool on November 11, it appears that several of the men were posted directly to a ship. Others were ordered to undergo further training at various Royal Navy establishments and thus, likely having journeyed by train, reported to these bases only hours later.

(Right: A relatively new vessel, 'Franconia' had been launched on July 23 of 1910. Remaining un-requisitioned as a troop transport until early 1915, it was to be well over a year later that on 4 October, 1916, while heading for Salonika, she was torpedoed and sunk by a German submarine to the east of Malta She was not carrying any troops at the time, but out of her 314 crew members, 12 died. – photograph from *Wikipedia*)



Seaman Mugford was not immediately dispatched to a ship, although in only a few days' time he would be. But at first he was sent to serve until November 29 at the Royal Naval training establishment HMS *Vivid I - this Division 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 November 29-30, Seaman Mugford was transferred from HMS Vivid I on land, to HMS Columbella, there to serve at sea. She had initially been the eight-thousand ton SS Columbia built in 1902 for the Anchor Line. Requisitioned early in the conflict, she had been refitted and armed with six six-inch naval guns as well as two six-pounder weapons (other sources say differently).

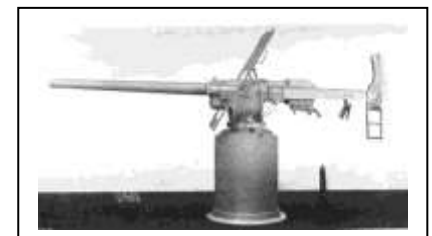


She was commissioned as HMS Columbella at nine o’clock in the morning of that November 30. Her crew* was to at least partially comprise one-hundred twenty ratings, Seaman Mugford among that number, all of whom had likely travelled overnight from the south of England to Scotland and to the port-city of Glasgow where they reported to the ship at eleven-thirty on that same morning.



***Apparently to total two-hundred seventy ratings and twenty-eight officers.**

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



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

HMS *Columbella* was to remain berthed in Glasgow until December 17 preparing for her first patrol as a ship of the Tenth 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 January of 1915, had been replaced by requisitioned ocean-going passenger–cargo ships carrying a number of guns, in some cases as elderly as some of the venerable vessels on which they were mounted.

The ships of the Tenth 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 daily task of the ships of these ships 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 *Columbella* was to spend only thirteen days at sea before putting into the English west-coast port of Liverpool. It had been a short and not particularly busy patrol: she had communicated with eight ships of the Royal Navy, mostly fellow armed merchant cruisers, and sighted just a single commercial vessel, a Norwegian freighter, which they had not challenged.

While in Liverpool. On January 6 the ship's log-book reads partially as follows: *4.30pm: Mumford, RNR, left ship for hospital. Could this in fact have been Seaman Mugford who in his Service Records is documented as having become on that very day the responsibility once more of HMS Vivid? Alas! – there appears to be no further information about him until he re-joined Columbella on March 31-April 1, some three months later while the vessel was again in port in Glasgow.*

In August of 1915 Seaman Mugford was to be involved in an operation to search for a suspected German submarine base on *Bear Island*, the southernmost island of the Spitzbergen (*Svalbard*) archipelago located in the Arctic Ocean. HMS *Columbella*, the sloop HMS *Acacia* and two of His Majesty's armed trawlers were dispatched to investigate, the expedition thereupon spending the entire month to sail there, to find no trace of any submarine activity whatsoever, and to return to Glasgow via the naval base of *Scapa Flow* in the Orkney Islands.

Seaman Mugford was then to serve a further fifteen months on *Columbella* although, unfortunately, the ship's log-books for June of 1916 until August of 1917 (inclusive) are as yet unavailable. But from September, 1915, until May, 1916, they show that Seaman Mugford and his ship put into the city of Glasgow on the River Clyde, Scotland, on four occasions for a total of eighty-five days; and seven times – usually for just three or four days at a time for a total of twenty seven – visited the coaling-station of Busta Voe and the

anchorage of Swarbacks Minn located on an inlet flowing into the Shetland Islands and more or less incommunicado from most places – although station's strategic placing allowed the ships of the *Northern Patrol* to spend a great deal more time on the job.

The remainder of those nine recorded months – September, 1915, to May, 1916 – were spent by Seaman Mugford at sea.

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.

The port where Seaman Mugford was to be discharged from *Columbella* was surely recorded on those absent log-books but not among his own files although the day on which he then returned – at least *officially* – to HMS *Vivid* is documented as having been December 1, 1916.

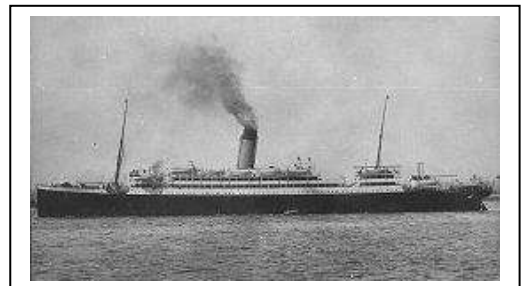
Having served almost two years of service at sea, Seaman Mugford had been deemed by the authorities to be deserving of a month's leave back in Newfoundland. When the details of passage had been decided, the ship on which he was to journey was to be the armed merchant cruiser, HMS *Laurentic*, which was very soon to sail.

Seaman Mugford 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 Birkenhead, the port adjacent to Liverpool, on that January 23, 1917, 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 and right below: *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.

(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 William Mugford, fisherman, and of Lavinia Mugford (née *Hussey**) of Clarke's Beach in the District of Port de Grave, he was also brother to Samuel, Julia, John-Thomas, Emma**, Nathaniel**, Frances (*Fanny*), Minnie, William-George, Ethel-Theresa and Susan- Lavinia(?).

**The couple had married in the community of Clarke's Beach on January 20, 1877.*

***Vital Statistics has them both born in 1882 – in October and August respectively – suggesting that one of them, likely Emma – was in fact born a year later.*

Jacob Mugford had married Ethel May Snow on July 15, 1911. After the death of Seaman Mugford his widow had later married again, on March 28, 1918, in the Canadian Province of Québec, to William Matthew Wood.

Seaman Jacob Mugford was reported as having died in the...*sinking of HMS Laurentic*...on January 25 of 1917 at the age of thirty-one years: date of birth at Clarke's Beach, Newfoundland, October 7 of 1886 (from his enlistment papers) and October 9, 1886 (from a copy of Newfoundland Vital Statistics).

Seaman Mugford 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 Jacob Mugford was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, 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 21, 2023.