

MUGFORD . N .



Seaman Nathan Mugford, Number 1171x, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on a bronze beneath the Caribou at the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

Having travelled from the District of Port de Grave to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on August 17 of 1914, Nathan Mugford, fisherman, answered the summons of the naval authorities and reported...*to duty*...at the Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below)\*.



Several months prior to this, on January 12 of that same year, Nathan Mugford had enlisted into the Reserve (see further below); had signed on for a five-year term with the Royal Naval Reserve; had successfully undergone the required medical assessment; and had undergone a twenty-eight day program of training.

He perhaps had also attested on this first occasion, 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, 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 minimal.***

***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, 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.***

***(continued)***

(Right: HMS '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. – Royal Navy photograph from 1898 by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)



Following those afore-mentioned twelve weeks less a day spent in St. John's\*, Seaman Mugford, promoted by this time from the rank of seaman recruit and one of a draft of three-hundred nine Naval Reservists and officers, embarked on November 5-6 onto the Cunard ocean-liner Franconia which had arrived in St. John's having sailed from New York.

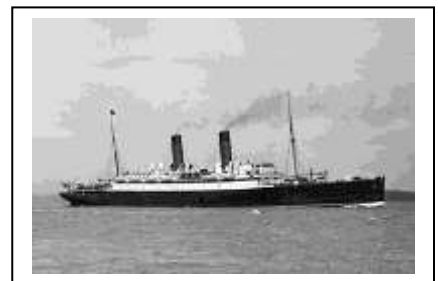
Their ship then having docked in the English port-city of Liverpool on November 12, several of the Reservists were posted directly to a ship. Others were ordered to undergo further training at various Royal Navy establishments and, likely having journeyed by train, reported to these bases on or about November 13.

*\*Seaman Mugford is not reported as having undergone any further training – in fact it appears that in his case any training was waived by 'Royal Proclamation'. Was he permitted leave to return home?*

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



(Right below: 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 U-boat to the east of Malta She was not carrying any troops at the time, but out of her 314 crew members, 12 died. – the photograph is from *Wikipedia*)

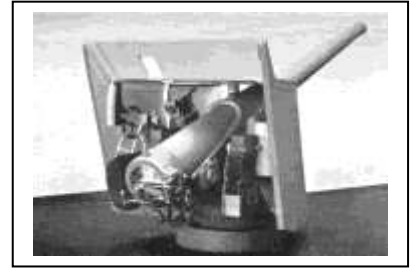


Seaman Mugford appears to have been one of those ordered directly to a ship, in his case it was to be the Calyx, by that time one of sixty larger passenger and cargo vessels which were to be converted for war-time duties.

Built in 1904 for its owner, the *Wilson Line*, to thereupon be named *Calypso*, she was a ship of just fewer than three-thousand tons constructed for use on routes from Great Britain to Sweden. Requisitioned soon after the onset of the *Great War*, her name was changed to *Calyx* to avoid confusion with HMS *Calypso* – whether the one in Newfoundland or the new cruiser of that name soon to be built is not clear: perhaps both – she was fitted and armed with eight 4.7-inch naval guns and two quick-firing three-pounder weapons.

*Calyx* went into her war-time service on November 9 of 1914 with Seaman Mugford likely to serve on her first patrol with the 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Patrol in the area of north Atlantic waters encompassed by Ireland, northern Scotland and Iceland.

(Right: A British 4.7-inch naval gun such as those mounted onto '*Calyx*' – from Wikipedia)



*\*On June 26 of 1916 'Calyx' returned to her mercantile service. However she was unable to escape the War: on Jul 10, while on her way to Denmark with a general cargo, she was torpedoed and sunk by the German submarine U-53 with a loss of thirty lives.*

Seaman Mugford was to serve on *Calyx* (some of the earlier days only on paper) until March 27 of the following year, for perhaps only four patrols, before being transferred to shore and to *Victory I* in the naval port-city of Portsmouth in the southern English county of Hampshire.

His tenure there was to be of short duration: seventeen days.

HMS *Victory*, like most of the so-called *stone-frigates* (naval establishments on shore), was three entities: it was a training establishment originally, but then also a holding-barracks for seamen awaiting a posting on a ship, all of which had originally been based in the naval city and port of Portsmouth\*; thirdly, it was also, as explained further below, the ship to which the majority of the land-based personnel would have been, at least officially and bureaucratically attached\*\*. At Portsmouth this ship 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.



*\*In many cases the large influx of personnel due to the War necessitated some 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, obsolescent and obscure vessel – HMS '*Victory*' the exception - was used for this purely bureaucratic purpose.*

These shore bases and training establishments were often separated into different Divisions; for example *Victory II*, as with *Vivid II*, *Pembroke II* etc., was assigned at least partially for the training of stokers – many ships were still coal-fired – and of other engine-room specialists.

Being an ordinary seaman, it was to *Victory I* that Seaman Mugford was assigned, likely to the holding barracks as he was to be stationed there for only seventeen days – from March 28 until April 14 of that 1915 before being ordered to join the crew of another armed merchant cruiser, HMAMC *Alcantara* – but see further below.

She was a recently-constructed vessel of almost sixteen-thousand tons of the *Royal Mail Steam Packet Line*. She was more heavily armed than Seaman Mugford's previous ship, *Calyx*, having been equipped with eight six-inch guns as well as two quick-firing anti-aircraft six-pounders and depth-charges, and was manned by a crew of well over three-hundred personnel.



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

She officially went into service on March 10 of 1915 although she would not sail on her first patrol with the 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron until early May by which time she was still in Liverpool concluding her re-fitting and other necessary preparations prior to departure\*. Thus, when *exactly* Seaman Mugford reported to his ship is not clear.

The 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron – of which, as has been seen, *Calyx* was also a ship - known also as the *Northern Patrol*, was a force originally having comprised out-of-date warships which, by that January of 1915, had been replaced by requisitioned ocean-going passenger–liners and cargo-carriers, at time elderly, equipped with a few guns as old as the sometimes venerable ships on which they were mounted.

The ships of the 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron were not spoiling 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 above-mentioned northern waters, a thankless job at the best of times: during the tempestuous winter months, even worse.

*Alcantara* steamed from Liverpool on May 5 and during the thirty-three days that followed she met with a number of Royal Navy ships – fifteen - some requiring a visit by personnel in the ship's cutter; nor were the seas to the north and north-west of the British Isles as devoid of other traffic as might be imagined: a variety of twenty-five vessels flying both British and neutral flags were observed, questioned, at times boarded and even ordered to a British port with a boarding-party in charge.



The patrol typically lasted about a month by which time fuel and rations – and at times perhaps patience – were beginning to run low. On June 7 *Alcantara* returned to Liverpool for a nine-day period before returning to the North Atlantic.

There was to be little rest for the ship's crew in the days in port that followed: tons of coal had to be loaded – oil was almost still a novelty – and there was always the scrubbing of decks, the cleaning and painting of the vessel, the replenishing of stores, a myriad of small repairs, the maintenance of the ship's cutter and other lesser boats, as well as the most welcome mail and less welcome daily on-board tasks to organize and undertake.

(Preceding page: *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 several months that followed brought more of the same as before: four weeks at sea before more than a week ashore if at Liverpool or nearby Birkenhead, only four days if the anchorage at Swarbacks Minn in the Shetlands was visited, as it often was. For those serving on *Alcantara*, that Christmas of 1915 was spent afloat without celebration although the ship was back in Liverpool on December 26, Boxing Day, there to remain until January 14.



(Right above: *The photograph of HMAMC 'Alcantara' is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

On the above-mentioned January 14 she sailed from Liverpool and was engaged in the routine of patrol work for the remainder of that month. The final page of the log-book of that month is for January 31 – not unsurprisingly - at which time she may have been preparing for the return run to port. At any rate there are no further records as the log-book for February likely went down with the ship.



The events of February 29 as presented below are to be found in several sources and, again not surprisingly, they differ from time to time. The one below, adapted, is to be found on the *South West Arm Historical Society* web-site:

*Reprinted from The Packet, July 3, 2019 by Lester Green*

(Left: *Seaman William Peddle and Seaman J. William Peddle. (Photo courtesy of Lana Rowsell)*)

The battle between *Alcantara* and the *Grief* was described by writers as an old-time fight between two armed cruisers. When the gun smoke settled, the two ships were resting on the bottom of the sea. There were twelve Newfoundlanders on board *Alcantara*, among them Hodge's Cove sailor, Seaman William Peddle. He would be Mentioned in Dispatches by his commanding officer.

In March of 1916 several world newspapers listed the following news item from London:

**LONDON, March 25.** — *The news was given out here today of a fight in the North Sea between the German raider Greif and the British armed merchant cruiser Alcantara, in which both vessels were sunk. Five German officers and 115 men out of a total of 300 were captured. The British lost five officers and 69 men. The Greif was sunk by gun fire, and the Alcantara by a torpedo.*

Among the crew of the *Alcantara* were twelve Newfoundland Royal Naval Reservists. Two sailors from Port de Grave did not survive – Seaman Nathan Mugford and Seaman William Henry Dawe.

Seaman William Peddle of Hodge’s Cove was also a crew member when the ship unexpectedly encountered the German raider disguised as a Norwegian merchant ship. The *Grief* was displaying the name *Rena* and flying the Norwegian flag.

The story of this encounter was recounted many times by Seaman Peddle.

**List of Newfoundland Crew aboard the HMS Alcantra**

1. Seaman Nathan Mugford 1171X Port de Grave
2. Seaman William H. Dawe 1174X Port de Grave
3. Seaman John Young 546X Upper Island Cove
4. Seaman Alfred Andrews 644X Sheartown
5. Seaman Samuel W. Carter Greenspond
6. Seaman William Peddle Hodge's Cove
7. Seaman Herbert Russell Bay Roberts
8. Seaman Naboth Butt Flat Islands, B.B.
9. Seaman Liol Hann Bel Island
10. Seaman Patrick Bennett St. John's
11. Seaman Augustus Seaward New Perlican
12. Seaman John C. Tucker Port De Grave

***Newfoundland sailors on Alcantara . Source: Parson’s Book-The Best Small-Boat Seaman in The Navy.***

In interview conducted with James Peddle of Hodge’s Cove during the fall of 2017, he recalled the many stories he had heard from William, or “Uncle Bill”, during visits with his father, Archer Peddle, who had also served in the war.

The following account is James re-collection of the events as told by Uncle Bill:

*“The Greif was a disguised German surface raider that looked like a merchant ship but carried light armour that was hidden. She had raided the coast of England a number of times and the Admiralty ordered a search for this ship. They were searching up around the Skagerrak (the German name for the body of water between the Baltic Sea and the North Sea) where the Greif used to raid the coast.*

*Uncle Bill was onboard when they sighted a ship showing the Norwegian colors.*

*The Alcantara order the ship to stop and prepared a boarding party to check for contraband. Uncle Bill was part of the boarding crew when the landing boat was lowered into the water.*

*Another British ship, HMS Andes, that was off in the distance, realized that this was the ship that they were seeking. Immediately they sent an urgent, open message to the Alcantara that this was the German raider.*

*The German raider also picked up the message that said, “You are in the presence of an enemy ship.”*

*The Alcantara response was, “Where?”*

*The Andes responded, “The ship that you are about to board.”*

*The Greif also heard and understood the messages and responded with running up the German colors.*

*Both ships were stopped when the Greif started to fire its guns.*

*The Alcantara responded, but as for Uncle Bill and the boarding party who were hanging over the side when the Alcantara started to move, they were in great danger of losing their life.*

*Some of the men in the boarding boat were shot. Uncle Bill was about to climb up the rope but stepped aside to allow the officer of the boarding party to climb first. When Uncle Bill got to the deck, the officer was lying dead on the deck. None of the others from the boarding party survived.*

*In the ensuing battle both ships were disabled and eventually sank. When Uncle Bill was about to abandon the ship, he noticed a fellow sailor with a broken leg. He got a lifejacket and gave the fellow his hat. Then he helped him into the water.*

*Uncle Bill was picked up by one of the British ships and the ship continued to pick-up survivors.*



*The crew of the rescue ship noticed what appeared to be a periscope. They fired upon what they believed was a German submarine.*

*Uncle Bill, however, always believed that it was not a submarine but a lifeboat from the Greif.*

*After Uncle Bill had returned to his base, he received a box in the mail. He opened it up and inside was the hat that he had given the sailor with the broken leg. That’s all I can remember about that story told by Uncle Bill.”*

*{Left: Oak leaf spray worn on Victory Medal.)*

*For his actions during this encounter Seaman William Peddle was Mentioned in Dispatches (MID). It is denoted by oak leaf emblem worn on the ribbon of the Victory (Inter-Allied) Medal.*

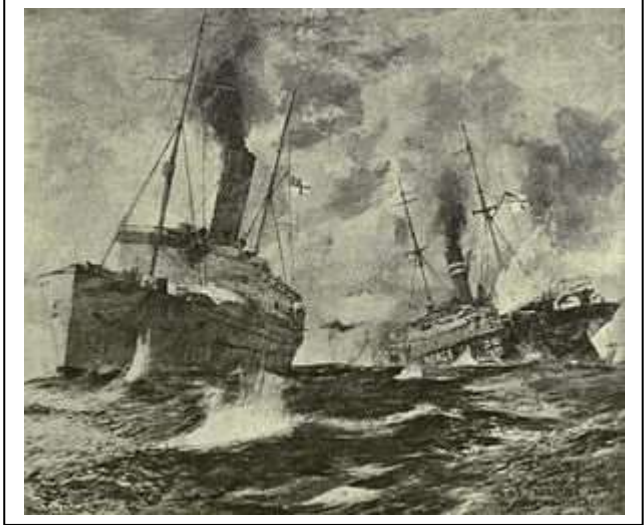
*Seaman Peddle returned safely to Hodge’s Cove after the war where he spent many hours recalling stories from the war.*

*He passed away in 1964 at the age of 84 years old and rests in the Anglican Cemetery in Hodge’s Cove.*

*A more detailed record of the action – once again adapted - as found in [Wikipedia](#), follows:*



*At about 8:45 a.m. on February 29 February, Alcantara was steaming north-north-east up its patrol line, when lookouts spotted smoke off the port beam; Captain Wardle manoeuvred closer to identify the source of the smoke. Unbeknownst to him, the smoke was from SMS Greif. A few minutes later Andes signalled "Enemy in sight north-east 15 knots" [17 mph (27 km/h)]. Wardle ordered Alcantara to turn north at maximum speed and soon sighted a ship with one funnel, flying Norwegian flags. Another message from Andes described a two-funnelled ship and the identity of the ship in sight remained doubtful.*



*(Right above : An artist's impression of HMS Alcantara (left) and SMS Greif dueling at close range during the action of 29 February, 1916 – from Wikipedia)*

*A few minutes later, Andes was seen to starboard, apparently steaming north-east at speed, as if in pursuit. Before joining the chase, Wardle decided to examine the unknown ship, went to action stations and fired two blanks to force it heave to. By 09:20, Wardle had received a signal by Andes that it had altered course to the south-east, which only added to the ambiguity, because the ship hove to could not be the one being pursued. The lookouts on the Alcantara could see the Norwegian name Rena on the stern and that the ship looked authentic.*

*A boat was lowered from Alcantara when it was about 1,000 yd (910 m) astern to check the ship's particulars, as the voyage of the Rena had been notified to the Admiralty. Wardle signalled to the Andes of developments and Captain Young replied with "This is the suspicious ship". As the message was being read, a gun at the stern of the "Rena" was unmasked and flaps fell down along the sides, revealing more guns. Greif opened fire, hitting the boat containing the boarding party and also Alcantara's telemotor steering gear before the British ship could reply. Alcantara's gunners opened fire and the ship closed with the raider as it began to get under way. For about fifteen minutes the ships exchanged fire; Andes opened fire as it arrived and Greif began to disappear in smoke. The German gunners ceased fire and boats full of survivors were seen pulling away from the smoke. Alcantara was badly damaged and also ceased fire, apparently torpedoed and listing to port; Wardle ordered an abandon ship and by 11:00 a.m. the list had put Alcantara on its beam ends (on the brink of capsizing); it sank with 69 members of the crew.*

*(Captain) Hotham in HMS Comus, the most northern of the cruisers from Scapa, had seen the signals from Andes and sailed south in company with the destroyer Munster; he arrived as the action ended, beginning rescue work with the crew of the Alcantara as it sank. Andes had reported a submarine between it and the lifeboats and could not close; after several submarine alarms, Comus and Andes moved closer to the wreck of Greif and sank it with gunfire; about 220 men of its crew of 360 were rescued.*

The son of Nathaniel Mugford, fisherman, and of Elizabeth Ann Mugford (née *Porter*\*) of Port de Grave, in the District of the same name, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Samuel, Alexander, Sarah, Emma, Emily, Wilfred and to John.

*\*The couple was married in the community of Port de Grave on November 1 of 1881.*

Seaman Nathan Mugford was reported as having been...*killed in action...* on February 29 of 1915 at the age of twenty-four years: date of birth in Sandy Cove, District of Port de Grave, Newfoundland, June 29, 1892 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register), January 1 of 1892 (from *Ancestry.ca*) and June 28 of the same year (from his enlistment papers).

(Right above: *The sacrifice of Nathan Mugford is honoured on the War Memorial in the District of Port de Grave. – photograph from 2010*)

(Right: *The image of Seaman Mugford in naval uniform is from the Canadian Virtual War Memorial, Veterans' Affairs Canada, and donated to the site by the Mugford Family\**)

*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 Nathan Mugford 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 cap-band of Seaman Mugford in the above photograph shows him to be serving at the time with HMS 'Excellent', not a ship but the Royal Navy Gunnery School on Whale Island at the entrance to Portsmouth Harbour. However, nowhere in his records – sparse as they are – is there any documentation pertaining to service at 'Excellent'.*

*On the other hand, of course, both the ships on which he was to serve, 'Calyx' and 'Almanzara' carried heavy weaponry which required specialized training.*

Any enlightenment would be appreciated by the author.



**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.**