



Seaman Josiah Porter, Number 1963x, is buried in the Port de Grave Church of England Cemetery, and is also commemorated on the Screen Wall – as seen above - in Mount Pleasant Cemetery in St. John’s.

Having relinquished his occupation of the time, likely that of a fisherman, and having travelled from the not-distant Conception Bay community of Hibbs’ Cove to St. John’s, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on November 16 of 1915 Josiah Porter

reported...to duty...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that same mid-November day he enlisted for the first time into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for a single year of war-time service and also underwent the requisite medical assessment. Josiah Porter most likely was then subsequently to attest, 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.*)

**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.



(Right: HMS 'Calypso' is seen here in full sail. The vessel was to be re-commissioned HMS 'Briton' in 1916 when a new 'Calypso', a modern cruiser, was launched by the Royal Navy. – The Royal Navy photograph dated 1898 is by courtesy of the Admiralty House Museum)

Only twenty-two days* after having been...taken on strength...on 'Calypso', his sparse Service Records document that it was on December 8 that the now-Seaman Porter – promoted from the rank of seaman recruit - was on his way to the United Kingdom.



***It appears that in many cases, even if the recruit in question had not already previously been with the Royal Naval Reserve, the required twenty-eight day training period, all or partially, was waived by 'Royal Proclamation'.**

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

On the date of his departure it was a draft of one-hundred Newfoundland Reservists accompanied by perhaps two officers – which was to begin the journey across the island by express train. Upon the contingent's arrival at Port aux Basques, it was to embark onto the by-that-time Reid Newfoundland Company vessel, the SS Sagona, for passage on the night of December 9-10, 1915, to North Sydney, to arrive there at six o'clock in the morning.



(Preceding page: *The photograph of the SS 'Sagona', a 'Crosbie Red Cross Line' ship at the time and possibly at Harbour Grace with a sealing crew aboard, is from the 'Maritime History Archive' web-site.*)

The *Sagona's* passenger manifesto for December 9-10 of 1915, then records that by half-past six the contingent had cleared customs and immigration formalities. The party was then to undertake the onward journey at seven fifteen, via Halifax on the *Intercontinental Railway*...(but see immediately below).

The *Discharge Register Royal Naval Reserve*, also as cited above, documents that the draft was now to board the SS *Scandinavian* and the passenger manifesto of the *Sagona* records that the detachment was to...*travel by rail to Quebec*...in order to do so.



(Right: *The image of the 'White Star Line' vessel 'Romanic', taken before 1912 when she was sold to the 'Allan Line' and re-named 'Scandinavian', is from the 'Wikipedia' web-site.*)

However, the Port of Montréal Harbour Master's Register of Sea-Going Vessels, records only three smaller ships sailing from there in early December – and the SS *Scandinavian* was not one of them. This was likely because the St. Lawrence River had started to freeze, in which case – as it was every year – vessels were to leave from Saint John, New Brunswick, the port and city not only ice-free but joined to Montréal by railway.

This was the normal arrangement with the *Allan Line* ships which, during the winter months, sailed from St. John – possibly via Halifax – to Liverpool. Thus the Newfoundland Reservist Draft recorded above made its way, still likely by rail, not as documented from North Sydney to Québec, but to Saint John for passage to the United Kingdom.

British records have the *Allan Line* ship, the SS *Scandinavian*, arriving in Liverpool from Saint John, New Brunswick, on December 20 of 1915 with the Reservists on board.

Having arrived in the United Kingdom towards the end of that third week of December, the Naval Reserve personnel would thereupon have been either posted directly to a vessel or ordered to undergo further training – or to simply await a posting to one of His Majesty's ships - at one of various Royal Navy establishments – these for the most part operating around the southern coast of England.

In the case of Seaman Porter, the destination was to be HMS *Victory I*.

**The Royal Navy had a disciplinary system which in certain ways differed from civil – and even Army – law; but for it to be employed, a sailor had to be attached to a ship. While at sea, of course, this posed no problem, but when a sailor was performing duties on land that were not associated directly to a particular ship he still had to be held accountable for any untoward behaviour.*

The Navy's training establishments were for the most part on land: Devonport (although apparently it was only a shore-base during the Great War), Chatham, and Portsmouth for example, were land bases for many thousands of naval personnel, some of who were

permanently stationed there. Thus the practice became to base an elderly or even obsolete ship in the nearby port to be, nominally, the vessel to which this personnel was to be attached. This appears to have been the procedure for the large number of shore bases organized around the coast of the United Kingdom during the Great War.

(Right below: HMS 'Victory' is seen here in dry dock in the southern English naval port-city of Portsmouth where she has been sited since the late 1920s – photograph from Wikipedia)

Thus, HMS 'Victory', the base to which Seaman Porter had been ordered after his arrival in the United Kingdom from Newfoundland, was not only all the buildings and facilities on shore, but also HMS 'Victory' the warship, the vessel from which Admiral Nelson had directed the Battle of Trafalgar – although the ship's illustrious history is not limited to that one single incident.



It was also the name which all the sailors attached to HMS 'Victory' were to have emblazoned on the bands of their afore-mentioned caps.

Furthermore, these establishments were at times divided into sections: 'Victory I' was where personnel (as opposed to the engine-room personnel, for example, in 'Victory II') such as Seaman Porter were to be stationed while awaiting a posting to one of His Majesty's ships.

His Service Records show it was not until the seventeenth day of April, 1916, that Seaman Porter was to be transferred from *Victory I*, at least *officially*, to service with HMS *Hindustan* where he was to remain for sixty-two days, until the eighteenth day of June.

HMS *Hindustan* was one of a class of battleships – the *King Edward VII-class* - which preceded the revolutionary *Dreadnoughts* by only a few years and which was a powerful fighting-vessel in her own right. At the outset of the *Great War*, formed with other such warships into the 3rd Battle Squadron, she had been attached to the *Grand Fleet*, had worked as a component of the *Northern Patrol* and had been transferred to the *Channel Fleet*, before returning once again to serve with the *Grand Fleet*.

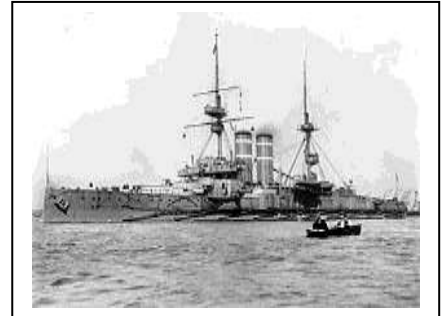
But the *Dreadnought* battle-ships and battle-cruisers were to supplant the less-recently constructed vessels such as the *King Edward VII-class* on the Royal Navy's list of priorities. Thus, when Seaman Porter was ordered to HMS *Hindustan* the 3rd Battle Squadron was on its way to be re-based at Sheerness, on the estuary of the River Thames and, only days later, was to be separated from the *Grand Fleet*. At the same time the Squadron was transferred to *Nore Command*, to become responsible for guarding the entrance to the River Thames itself, a role that was to continue for much of the remainder of the *Great War*.

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Seaman Porter's Service Records show that he was to be attached to *Hindustan* until the end of March of 1917 although exactly what his duties comprised on board that ship is not to be found from among those same papers.

During that period of almost a year he was to be ordered to return to serve at *Victory I* from June 19 until July 15 of that 1916, although, once again, to what end is not clear.

(Right: The image of HMS 'Hindustan' is from the 'Wikipedia' web-site. Having been decommissioned before the end of the conflict, she was sold in 1921 and would be broken up two years later.)



Having left service with HMS *Hindustan* definitively on March 31, 1917, Seaman Porter was ordered to *Pembroke I*, another land-based Royal Navy establishment, this one at the town of Chatham on the River Medway, one of the places that *Hindustan* and the other ships of the *Nore Command* had been protecting for the eleven previous months.

(Right: A part of the large Royal Navy complex which was the HMS 'Pembroke' naval establishment at Chatham for just over one hundred years. Today it has been transformed into a university campus. – photograph from 2010)



Seaman Porter served on *Pembroke I*'s books for fifty-four days before he was then documented being back in Newfoundland on HMS *Briton* in St. John's. No details of his return crossing appear to be available.

However, following his return home, the vessel's passenger list shows that he was on his way again on June 27-28 of 1917 on board the SS *Kyle* en route to North Sydney, Cape Breton. From there he and sixty-two other Reservists continued on to Halifax by train where Seaman Porter was, some two weeks later, perhaps after specialized training, to become a member of a crew on a Q-ship. The destination of his fellow travellers is for the moment not clear.

In the early days of the *Great War* submarines operated by what was almost a code of chivalry, at least towards merchant and passenger shipping: the ship to be attacked was done so by the submarine on the surface. If the submarine's commander decided to sink the ship – if it was a passenger ship it was often allowed to continue on its way – the crew of the vessel was granted time to take to the boats. The submarine then did its work by gunfire or torpedo before proceeding on its way – not without at times having directed the life-boats towards the nearest port*.

*This was true even as late as 1916. An example is the Bowring Brothers' ship, the SS 'Stephano' – sister of 'Florizel' – which was sunk off the American East Coast in that year but without loss of life.

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Despite this handicap under which the submarines operated, merchant shipping losses mounted and not every encounter was an exercise in nautical chivalry: *Lusitania* comes to mind - although she may have been carrying war materials.

The British thus decided to counter the U-boat danger with the introduction of Decoy-ships – otherwise known as Q-ships - heavily-armed vessels playing the role of potential victim, even to the point of flying neutral flags. Once the surfaced submarine came close enough, the flags were quickly changed for British White Ensigns, the concealed guns were un-veiled, and the vulnerable submarine had to fight it out, at times not very successfully.

In the beginning the ruse worked, but less so as time passed, and as one might surmise, fewer submarine commanders chose to surface to sink their targets. Many vessels were now lost without any warning being issued.

The *Albert H. Whitman* was such a Q-ship. A schooner built and launched in 1916 in Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia, for a company in nearby Lunenburg, she was converted and armed to come into service in July of 1917 at the time of Seaman Porter's arrival from Newfoundland. Where his ship was stationed appears not to be recorded but it may have been Halifax, Nova Scotia.



(Right above: *Naval guns were concealed in myriad ways on innocuous-looking vessels to be revealed at only the last moment. – photograph from Wikipedia*)

How successful Seaman Porter and the *Albert H. Whitman* were to be during the four months that he served on board her is not clear*, but the statistics show that gradually it was the U-boat that was winning this aspect of the *Great War*. Seaman Porter served on her until November 22-23, 1917, when he was again transferred**.

**The Q-ships were a closely-guarded secret and many of the pertinent records and documents were apparently subsequently destroyed.*

***The schooner 'Albert H. Whitman' was to operate as a Q-ship only during the period that Seaman Porter was recorded as serving on her – from July 10, 1917, until November 22 (inclusive) of the same year.*

The above-mentioned transfer was to HMCS *Niobe*, Depot Ship and Headquarters-Ship since 1915 of the Royal Canadian Navy on Canada's east coast, and established in Halifax. On the aforesaid November 23 of 1917 he was taken onto the nominal roll of the vessel – although whether this was the exact date on which he was to report to his new ship is not clear.



The ship, an elderly cruiser, had been ceded to the fledgling Canadian Navy in 1910 by the British. Having served with the 4th Cruiser Squadron in the early years of the *Great War* – with a hundred Newfoundland Reservists seconded to provide a part of her crew – she

had thereupon been retired to become the administration centre of the Royal Canadian Navy in Halifax Harbour for the remainder of the conflict.

(Preceding page: *The photograph of Niobe seen here at anchor is from a Canadian Government web-site.*)

Two weeks less a day after Seaman Porter's official attachment to *Niobe*, there was to occur in Halifax Harbour an event as horrendous as anything else that was to be experienced during the war-time years: the *Halifax Explosion*.

On December 6 two ships, the Norwegian *Imo* and the French *Mont Blanc* collided, as a result of which the *Mont Blanc* caught fire. She was laden with explosives and the subsequent explosion - reportedly the largest man-made explosion in history up until that time - devastated both the port and the city itself. More than seventeen-hundred were killed and nine-thousand hurt.



The down-town and waterside areas of the city were devastated and to add to the misery of the now-homeless, a major winter storm was unleashed upon them on the following day.



(Right above: *A view of an obliterated Halifax with its harbour in the distance, the photograph taken two days after the incident. – from 'Wikipedia'*)

(Right above: *'Niobe' had sent one of its boats to the aid of 'Mont Blanc' before the ship exploded; when she did, all of the boat's crew were killed, as were some of those on board 'Niobe' itself – with several more hurt. 'Niobe' was damaged in the blast but was able to continue her functions in a diminished manner. – The photograph of a damaged Niobe is from the Canadian War Museum web-site.*)

According to Seaman Porter's Service Records, he was to remain to serve on HMCS *Niobe* for just more than a year. Then, on December 21 of 1918, he was once more on the *nominal roll* of HMS *Briton* in St. John's.



Whether or not it was on this exact date that he was to again set foot on *Briton* is not certain as by this time he may have been exhibiting at least some of the symptoms of the unrecorded disease to which was eventually to succumb. Nonetheless, he is recorded as still serving – perhaps receiving treatment - until March 20 of 1919 when he was demobilized, likely to return to his home in Hibbs' Cove in the District of Port de Grave*.

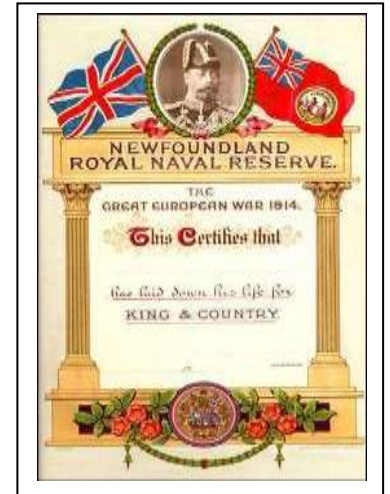
**He apparently received, perhaps at some time following his death, a gratuity for his war-time service. The money was returned by his family to HMS 'Briton' in October of that 1919.*

(Preceding page: Seaman Josiah Porter is recorded on the Port de Grave War Memorial only as having served in the Navy during the Great War, likely because he had been demobilized prior to his passing and was thus no longer considered to be in service at the time. However, the 'Commonwealth War Graves Commission' appears to regard his death to be that of a sailor of the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve.)

The son of Albert James Porter, fisherman deceased of pleurisy on August 11, 1905, and of Bridget Porter (née Warford*) of Hibbs' Cove, District of Port de Grave, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Mary-Esther, Arthur, Florence and to Walter, as well as half-brother to Ronald, Maxwell and John Dawe.

**After her husband's passing, on August 16 of 1909, Bridget Porter married William Henry Dawe.*

(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: whether one was received by the family of Seaman Josiah Porter is not clear.)



Seaman Josiah Porter was recorded as having died on May 8, 1919, at home of an unrecorded cause at the age of twenty-one years: date of birth at Hibbs' Cove, Newfoundland, March 25, 1896 (this date from only his enlistment papers), the year cited as 1898 in the Newfoundland Death (sic) Register.

Seaman Porter served only in the Royal Navy and was not in the service of Canada – he was only seconded to HMCS 'Niobe' - as is cited in some sources, notably the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Seaman Josiah Porter was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

