

Seaman Edgar Jonathan Spracklin, Number 1113x, lies in the Ballyhalbert Church of Ireland Graveyard in Northern Ireland.

(continued)

War having been declared, and thus having been summoned by Royal Proclamation to service by telegram, Edgar Jonathan Spracklin relinquished his work as a fisherman working out of the Conception Bay community of Cupids, and travelled to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on August 25 of 1914, he reported...*to duty**...on board the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below) and was...*taken on strength*.

Edgar Jonathan Spracklin had apparently already enlisted into the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) – also see further below – originally having been engaged on March 4, 1903, some eleven years before, and committed himself to a five-year period of service with the Reserve. During the intervening years he had re-enrolled twice: firstly in March of 1908, then again in April of 1913, and in those years had presented himself on ten occasions for a twenty-eight day period of training.

Edgar Jonathan Spracklin had also held three service numbers: 4959, 354 and, the most recent, 1113x – this last service designation presumably assigned in the year 1913. He had apparently also been the seventy-fourth man to register in the reserve and the longest-serving Reservist to also serve in the *Great War**.

Perhaps twelve months or so following training during the preceding year, the events of the summer of 1914 were to dictate that he be recalled to HMS *Calypso* to honour the commitments to the Crown that he had made and to sign on for war-time service**.

**This information is from two of the Registers of HMS 'Calypso'; his own personal papers cite April 24, 1913, as the day of his final enlistment, followed on the morrow by the requisite medical assessment.*

***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*

It appears not to be documented whether it was to be at this time that he would attest, pledging his allegiance* to the King-Emperor, George V.

**Had he done so in 1903 or 1908, it would have been to the preceding monarch, King Edward VII.*

(Right above: 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.)

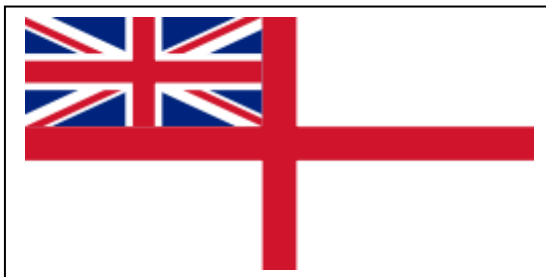


(Preceding page: At the outset of their career, the ‘Calypso-Class’ ships were apparently considered to be superior vessels. Hybrids - powered by both steam and sail - they were able to police the outer reaches of the British Empire most efficiently and economically. The rapid progress in engine technology, 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)

(Right: 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.



(continued)

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.

(Preceding page: 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: 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)



Following ten weeks and two days of waiting, possibly undergoing further training in St. John's, Seaman Spracklin, one of a draft of three-hundred five naval reservists, embarked on November 5-6 onto the *Cunard* ocean-liner *Franconia* which was on the trans-Atlantic return leg of its commercial route from New York to Liverpool.

Once having disembarked in the port-city of Liverpool 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 on or about November 15-16.

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



On the aforementioned November 15-16, Seaman Spracklin was...*taken on strength*...at HMS *Excellent*, the Royal Navy Gunnery School located on *Whale Island* at the entrance to the harbour at Portsmouth. He was to train there until December 17 when he was ordered to join his ship, HMS *Bayano* – she undergoing a re-fit in the Scottish port of Glasgow at the time, following which she was to be stationed there – and where he was likely destined to man one of the guns with which by that time the ship had just been equipped.

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

Bayano was a new ship, a smallish six-thousand ton passenger and cargo (particularly, apparently, bananas) vessel, built in 1913, and which was to be requisitioned during the early period of the *Great War* for service as an Armed Merchant Cruiser. To this end *Bayano* was armed with two six-inch guns – six-inches is the calibre – before being ordered into service on November 21 of 1914.



Bayano was to be attached to the 10th Cruiser Squadron, also known as the *Northern Patrol*, a force based at Scapa Flow – although often out of Liverpool - and originally having comprised out-of-date warships which, by that January of 1915, had been replaced by requisitioned ocean-going passenger–cargo ships fitted with guns, some as elderly as a number of the venerable ships on which they were mounted.

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

The ships of the 10th 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 stormy waters encompassed by Ireland, northern Scotland, the Shetlands and Iceland, a thankless job at the best of times: during the tempestuous winter months, even worse.



Two of the first losses during the War among those Armed Merchant Cruisers were to be vessels of the 10th Cruiser Squadron: *Viknor* was lost on January 13, 1915, taking with her the entire crew of three-hundred two, including twenty-five Newfoundland sailors; only three weeks later *Clan McNaughton* sank and a comparable number of crewmen died, of which twenty-two Newfoundlanders.



Bayano was to be the next.

(Right above: *HMS 'Bayano' is here seen clad in her war-time camouflage dress and with one of those six-inch guns prominent in a forward position. The caption also claims the year to be a rather doubtful 1913 – it cites her as 'coming into service' which, as seen above, was not until 1914. – photograph from Wikipedia*)

The following is an account of the sinking of HMS *Bayano* and is adapted from a report found on the '*Scottish Shipwrecks*' web-site:

(continued)

On 25th February, 1915 the submarine U-27* left Emden in the early morning. It was to be a sortie that would culminate in an attack on HMS Bayano in the Firth of Clyde two weeks later. The submarine passed north around Orkney on February 28, turned south west into the North Atlantic, then west of the Outer Hebrides to arrive in its patrol area in the North Channel on March 3. For the next week the U-boat roamed the area with no success until the morning of March 11 in the Firth of Clyde.

At that moment Bayano was returning to sea to her patrol duties under the command of Captain Carr with a crew of nearly two hundred and fifty. At 4:50am she was a few miles north of Corsewall Point, Galloway. The night was clear but overcast and dark and the sea calm. Two thirds of the crew were asleep, the third watch being in charge of the vessel steaming through the night.

The U-boat Captain later stated that through the periscope he saw a large commercial steamship steaming out of the Firth with lights dimmed. He was some 300 metres from the ship and fired a single torpedo from his bow tube. The torpedo struck Bayano on the forward quarter and exploded.

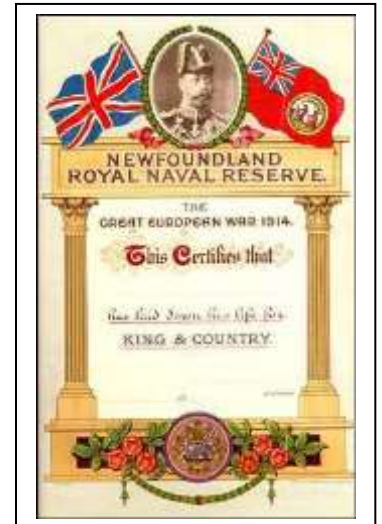
Aboard Bayano the explosion flung most of those sleeping from their hammocks, killing many instantly in and around the engine room where the torpedo struck. This first explosion was followed by further detonations in the ship's magazine. The vessel filled with smoke and steam, and water rushed in through holes in her hull. The survivors later told many stories of heroism aboard at that time: wireless operators remaining at their posts broadcasting SOS messages; the sailor handing out lifejackets to his colleagues as the sea rose around him; and the captain going down with his ship having organised the evacuation of as many as possible.

Within minutes of the initial explosion Bayano sank by the bow, her stern rising into the air before vanishing in a steamy, smoky cloud. A final explosion heralded her disappearance. The suction caused by the ship sinking dragged down many who had jumped into the sea.

(Right above: 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 first vessel to arrive on the scene was the SS Castlereagh of Belfast, its captain later to describe the scene confronting him as a 'sea of corpses in lifejackets'. He stopped his engines but, fearing the return of the same U-boat, then ordered full steam and set off to safely reach port.

Hours later the SS Balmaino also arrived at the scene of the sinking. Its captain, attracted by survivors waving from two of the ship's life-rafts and an upturned lifeboat, stopped to pick up twenty-four survivors.



(Preceding page: *The photograph of the SS 'Balmaino' is from The Scottish Shipwrecks web-site.*)

Bayano was lost with over two hundred of her crew, including eleven Newfoundland sailors. A second source cites twenty-six survivors, among them Leading Seaman Stephen Keates (458x) of Starr's Cove, Twillingate, rescued by the above-mentioned SS 'Balmaino'.

**On August 19 of that same year, the U-27 was sunk and its crew killed by a British Q-ship in circumstances that in some quarters was considered to be a war-crime. The entire incident, some sources claim, was apparently covered up by the Admiralty.*

The son of Thomas Spracklin, fisherman, and of Cecilia Spracklin, of Cupids in the District of Port de Grave, he was brother to Mary-Jane and to Georgina. He was also husband to Marcella Spracklin (née *Butler**) and father of Aleck-Lloyd, born in September, 1911, and of Gordon-Livingstone, born in February, 1913.

**The couple had married in Brigus on January 8 of 1906.*

(Right above: *The photograph of Seaman Spracklin is from the 'Find a Grave' web-site to which it has been appended by Nancy Wright.*)

(Right: *This white family memorial is dedicated to the memory of Seaman Spracklin and is to be found in Cupids' United Church Churchyard. – photograph from 2011(?)*)

Seaman/Gunner Spracklin died on March 11, 1915, at the recorded age of thirty-six years: date of birth at Cupids, Newfoundland, March 16, 1879 (from the Brigus Methodist United Church Birth Records via *Grand Banks Genealogy* and from his enlistment papers).

Seaman Spracklin 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 Edgar Jonathan Spracklin 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 19, 2023.