



Seaman George Alison Strange, Number 2718x, is buried in Port de Grave Methodist Cemetery in the District of the same name, and is also commemorated in Mount Pleasant General Protestant Cemetery in St. John's.

**Above right: Seaman G. A. Strange is seen here commemorated on the Screen Wall in Mount Pleasant Cemetery.*

(continued)

In late February of 1917, George Alison Strange travelled from the not-distant District of Port de Grave to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, where, on the twenty-seventh day of that month he reported...*to duty*...on the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Briton* (formerly HMS *Calypso*) moored in the harbour (see further below).

On that February 27*, 1917, he enlisted into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for the *Duration of the War* and also on that day underwent the required medical assessment. David Alison Strange also likely attested at this time, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V.

**This date is found on his Service Records but his enlistment papers show February 28 as the date for both his enlistment and medical examination.*

(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' (later 'Briton') 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.)

(continued)

***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, 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.



(Preceding page: *H.M.S. '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, taken in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum*)



(Right: *The C-Class cruiser 'Calypso' of 1916, seen here on an un-recorded date during the later years of the Great War, was to be sunk by an Italian submarine in 1940. – from Wikipedia*)

The service records of Seaman Strange do not document his travels overseas any further than the Canadian province of Nova Scotia: the passenger list of the *Reid Newfoundland Company* vessel *SS Kyle* records the crossing of a detachment of sixty-three(?) Naval Reservists from Port aux Basques, Newfoundland, to North Sydney, on the night of June 27-28 of 1917.

Among the Draft was Seaman G.A. Strange who, like his fellow Reservists, was *en route* by train to Halifax*, there...*to gain...ship*. At the time, Halifax was the major port for movements of military personnel across the Atlantic to the United Kingdom by troop transport, a system at times to be used by the (Royal) Newfoundland Regiment and by the Newfoundland Forestry Corps. However, the ship in question does not appear to have been identified.

**They had already crossed the Island of Newfoundland by express train from St. John's the day before.*

Troop transports were apparently rarely used by those of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland), and the passage of Newfoundland Reservists was usually undertaken by ships plying the commercial routes between North America and Great Britain. Such appears to have been the case with Seaman Strange's draft, although it is perhaps possible that he was never to make the crossing from Halifax at all, but to remain posted there (see below) – nor seems there to be any record of a return trans-Atlantic journey made by Seaman Strange.

He is recorded as having at this time served – as of July 10 - on a ship by the name of the *Alfred B. White*. Alas! – the author has as yet been unable to glean any information about her from any source, not even to identify her as either a Newfoundland, Canadian or British vessel - or of any other nationality. However, the Service Records of a Seaman Josiah Porter, Number 1963, his service dates and other circumstances at this time identical to those of Seaman Strange, suggest that the ship in question was the schooner *Albert H. Whitman*.

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.*

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 or 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 ensigns, the concealed guns were un-veiled, and the vulnerable submarine had to fight it out, often not very successfully.

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

The *Albert H. Whitman* was such a 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 Strange's arrival from Newfoundland. Where his ship was stationed appears not to be recorded but it may well 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 Strange 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*. He 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 serve as a Q-ship only during the period that Seaman Strange was recorded as serving on her – from July 10, 1917, until November 22 (inclusive) of the same year.*

But his service records subsequently show that after this void period of four months and a-half, he was next to serve back in Halifax. On November 23 of 1917 he was taken onto the nominal roll of HMCS *Niobe*, the Depot Ship and Headquarters of the Royal Canadian Navy on Canada' east coast – although whether this was the exact date on which he reported 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 Depot Ship of the Royal Canadian Navy in Halifax Harbour for the remainder of the conflict.



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

Two weeks less a day after Seaman Strange's official attachment to *Niobe*, there was to occur in Halifax Harbour an event as horrendous as anything else that may have been 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 damage Niobe is from the Canadian War Museum web-site.)*

(Right: *The sacrifice of Seaman George Alison Strange is honoured on the War Memorial which stands in the community of Port de Grave. – photograph from 2010*)



The role played by Seaman Strange on that December day does not appear among his papers. He was thus to remain posted to *Niobe* in Halifax Harbour for the next several months until the final day in September of 1918, although what his duties were during that apocalyptic period does not appear among any of his personal files.

Although his files appear to record him as having continued to serve on *Niobe* after that September 30, it is likely that he returned to St. John's at that time*, possibly even to return to his home in the hope of recuperation from the malady that was by then taking hold of him. The pandemic known to history as the *Spanish 'Flu* was already extracting its toll and although it is not confirmed, Seaman Strange may well have been exhibiting the symptoms by the time of his – unrecorded but certain - homeward journey.

**Even though his records show him to have remained attached to 'Niobe' after that September 30, other sources suggest that at the time he was transferred back to the register of HMS 'Briton'.*

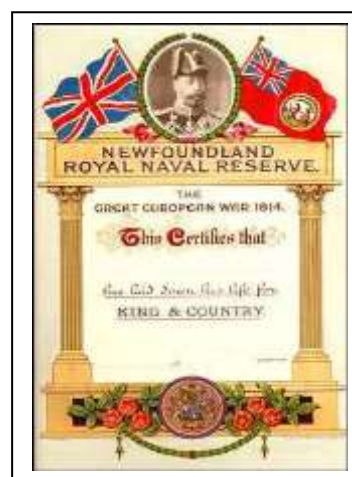


(Right above: *The sacrifice of Seaman George Strange is honoured on the Port-de Grave War Memorial. – photograph from 2010*)

(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 Batten Strange, fisherman, and of Emma Anne Strange (née *Parsons*), of the Conception Bay community of Port de Grave, he was brother to Harry, Albert, Mary, Laurie, Marcella, Emma and to Annie.

Seaman George Alison Strange is recorded as having...*died of pneumonia...at home in Port de Grave, on October 12, 1918, at the reported age of twenty-two years. Date of birth in Port de Grave, Conception Bay, Newfoundland, September 8, 1898* (from the Newfoundland Birth Register and his enlistment papers).



Seaman Strange served in the Royal Navy and was latterly seconded to the Royal Canadian Navy. The Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) was an entity of the Royal Navy, not the Royal Canadian Navy.

Seaman George Alison Strange was entitled to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

