

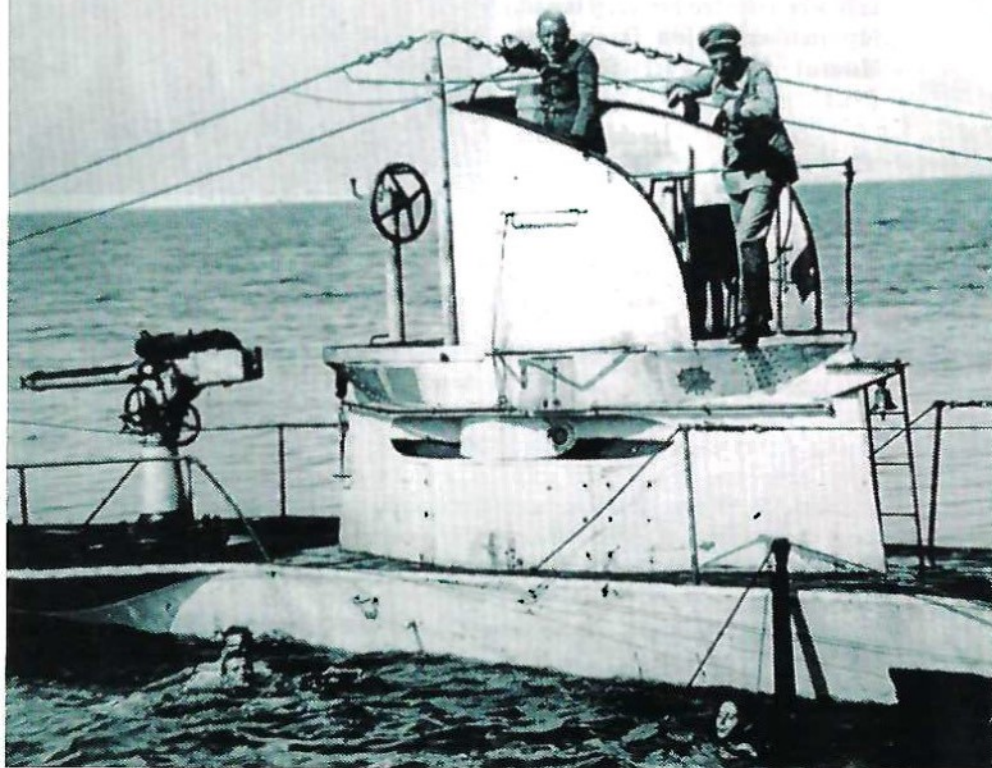
# ENCOUNTER

WITH

## GERMAN U-27

2 ATTACKS, 2 SHIPS, 1 SOUTHWEST  
ARM SEAMAN WHO DIDN'T COME HOME

By Lester Green



ON MARCH 11,

WE COMMEMORATE AN EVENT THAT HAPPENED 105 YEARS AGO. WE REMEMBER HOW THE CLAWS OF DESTINY WOULD PLACE THREE VESSELS IN DANGEROUSLY CLOSE PROXIMITY. THE GERMAN SUBMARINE U-27 WOULD DETERMINE THE OUTCOME OF THE TWO BRITISH VESSELS WHEN IT ENCOUNTERED THE SHIPS OFF THE COAST OF SCOTLAND.

FAMILIES FROM THE SOUTHWEST ARM REGION OF NEWFOUNDLAND WOULD BE DRAWN FOREVER INTO THIS STORY BY THE OUTCOME AT THE SETTING OF THE SUN ON THAT TRAGIC DAY. FUTURE GENERATIONS WOULD GATHER AROUND THEIR KITCHEN TABLES AND RECALL THE STORY OF THIS ENCOUNTER WITH GERMAN SUBMARINE U-27.

### THE OPPOSING SHIPS

Many Newfoundland Royal Naval Reservists were deployed overseas in the early stages of the First World War. Upon arrival overseas, these young men were assigned to an armed merchant cruiser (AMC). The vessels were used to form blockades against trade to and from Germany. The AMC used signalling to request the merchant ships to stop for inspection. A landing party would be dispatched and board the ship to inspect the cargo. If contraband was found, the ship was seized in the name of the King. The crew would later receive a share in the form of "prize money." This blockading by the navy was initially known as the Northern Patrol, but during the war it was more commonly referred to as the 10th Cruiser Squadron.

The *Bayano*, a merchant ship launched in 1913, was owned and operated by the company Elders and Fyffes. She was requisitioned and assigned to 10th Cruiser Squadron by the British Admiralty, and became known as HMS *Bayano*.

CREW ON DECK OF GERMAN U-27. Source <http://www.kuk-kriegsmarine.at>





SEAMAN SIMEON WHALEN



SEAMAN JOSIAH AVERY

The *Ambrose*, built in 1903, was owned and operated by the Booth Line company. The ship was also requisitioned, then commissioned as HMS *Ambrose* and assigned to the 10th Cruiser Squadron.

On May 8, 1914, the Imperial German Navy commissioned the construction of a submarine known as SM U-27. The crew consisted of four officers and 31 sailors under the command of Kapitänleutnant Bernd Wegner. Over the course of the war, U-27 was responsible for sinking 10 merchant ships and two destroyers.

### FATES INTERTWINED

Among those serving aboard the *Bayano* was Simcon Whalen. He was born at Caplin Cove, NL, on December 3, 1890, to William Thomas and Martha Mary Whalen. He enlisted on January 2, 1914, with the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve. On November 14, 1914, he was deployed overseas and assigned to HMS *Excellent*, a shore based accommodation, for further training. After 30 days training he got his transfer orders to HMS *Bayano*.

Another Royal Navy seaman from the Southwest Arm area of Newfoundland, Caleb Cooper of Queen's Cove, was serving aboard HMS *Ambrose*. He'd enlisted with the Royal Navy in February 1912, at the age of 18. In November 1914, he was deployed overseas and transported to England. He received further training at HMS *Vivid*, Devonport, England. On December 9, 1914, he was transferred to HMS *Ambrose*, where he joined two other sailors from the Southwest Arm area. Seaman Josiah Avery, the oldest son of

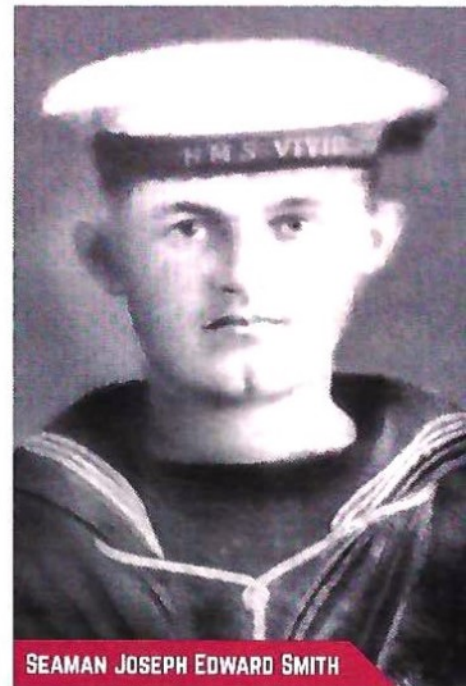
William and Myria Avery of Fox Harbour, first enlisted with the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve in the spring of 1913. He was recalled to St. John's at the outbreak of the war and, after training, was sent overseas on the SS *Franconia*. He was sent to a Seamanship, Signaling and Telegraphy school at HMS *Vivid* before being assigned to HMS *Ambrose* on December 9, 1914.

Josiah's first cousin, Seaman Joseph Edward Smith, was also aboard the *Ambrose*. The son of Thomas and Mary Ann Smith, he also grew up in Fox Harbour, known today as Southport. Seaman Smith initially enlisted with the Royal Naval Reserve in January 1913 and was ordered to report to HMS *Calypso* on August 4, 1914. He travelled overseas aboard the SS *Franconia* in November 1914, along with 33 other seamen from the Southwest Arm area. He was assigned to HMS *Vivid* at Devonport for further training and then assigned to HMS *Ambrose*.

### TRAGEDY AWAITED

Early on the morning of March 11, 1915, the *Bayano* was transferring coal from Glasgow to Liverpool, England when it was sighted by the German submarine U-27 off Corsewall Point, Galloway, Scotland. Kapitänleutnant Wegner placed HMS *Bayano* in the crosshairs of the periscope and gave the order to release U-27's torpedoes.

The torpedoes laid a direct hit on the *Bayano*. Most of the 220 sailors aboard were asleep and had no warning and no chance to escape. Within minutes the *Bayano* took 194 of its crew to a watery grave. Among the



SEAMAN JOSEPH EDWARD SMITH



SEAMAN CALEB COOPER



## The Harbor Grace Standard

AND

### CONCEPTION BAY ADVERTISER

FRIDAY, MARCH 19, 1915.

#### OUR THIRD HEATOMB.

**ELEVEN MORE OF OUR R. N. RESERVISTS DIE FOR HOME AND COUNTRY.**

Fears were entertained here that some of our Royal Newfoundland Reservists were on the converted liner *Bayano* sunk by a German submarine with nearly all her crew; but we were hardly prepared to hear that it had gone down in her, out of twelve known to be on board. Of these, one lived for some time in Harbor Grace, Barton Green, son of late Barton Green, of English parentage, that lived and did a good business at Seal Islands, Labrador. The deceased reservist's mother was a Harbor Grace woman, Miss Lavinia French. She married Mr. Green at Labrador who was then a widower. Another of the lost, W. H. Peach, is a brother of Miss Peach, the S. A. officer in charge here. To the relatives and friends of these and of the other lads that laid down their lives for Empire and native land, the sympathy of the country will be with them. The following is the official list of the lost and the survivor with some additional information from the Daily News "Who's Who":

**EDMUND BROWN**—Married, Southside, Fogo.

**THOMAS COPLEY**—Clarke's Beach, Salmon Cove, C.B.

**JOSEPH FAREWELL**—Seal Cove, Fogo.

**BARTON GREEN**—Son of William and Lavinia Green, Harbor Grace. Adopted son of Mrs. Cecely Spracklin, Cupids, now residing with her daughter in Sydney.

**SYLVESTER MARTIN**—La Scie, St. Barbe.

**WILLIAM PEACH**—Red Harbor, Placentia.

**CHARLES A. PIERCEY**—Red Harbor, Placentia Bay.

**EDGAR J. SPRACKLIN**—Son of Cicely and the late Thomas Spracklin, Cupids. Married. See Barton Green above.

**SIMEON WHALEN**—S. W. Arm, Raddom, T. B.

**WILLIAM KING**—Brigus.

**HAROLD A. STANLEY**—Kilbride, St. John's.

list of sailors lost to the sea was Seaman Simeon Whalen.

The destruction caused by U-27 was not yet completed that day because its periscope was soon focused on a new target: HMS *Ambrose*. The Royal Navy Log Books for HMS *Ambrose*, published on the Naval History website ([www.naval-history.net](http://www.naval-history.net)), contain a vivid description of the ship's encounter with U-27. From the log:

*1:20 p.m.: Attacked by submarine, torpedo missed bow by 20 yards.*

*Hands to General Quarters. Opened fire at the periscope astern.*

*1:30 p.m.: Increased to 91 revolutions.*

*2:05 p.m.: Attacked by another submarine, torpedo passed astern, opened fire on Port quarter.*

*2:22 p.m.: Attacked by another submarine on Port quarter, opened fire, suspected to have sunk her.*

The crew of the *Ambrose* believed that U-27 was sunk because no further attacks were made on their ship. Records would later reveal that U-27 was not finished, but continued to cause havoc for other merchant ships for months.

Later Seaman Smith, Seaman Avery and Seaman Cooper would learn about the fate of HMS *Bayano* and their fallen friend, Seaman Simeon Whalen.

On August 19, 1915, U-27 was finally sunk when the decoy ship, HMS *Baralong*, encountered the submarine on the surface and sprayed it with gunfire. Kapitänleutnant Bernd Wegener and his entire crew were killed. ☐