

DYKE, J. W.



Leading Seaman John Walter Dyke, Number 1215x, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on a bronze beneath the Caribou at the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

Having relinquished his occupation of the time and having travelled from the Eastport Peninsula community of Bishop's Harbour in the District of Bonavista Bay to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on August 15 - a second source has August 18 - of 1914 John Walter Dyke reported...to duty...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS Calypso, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that same mid-August day he enlisted for the first time, or perhaps re-enlisted* into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for war-time service** and underwent the required medical assessment at or about the same time. John Walter Dyke most likely was then also to attest, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V.

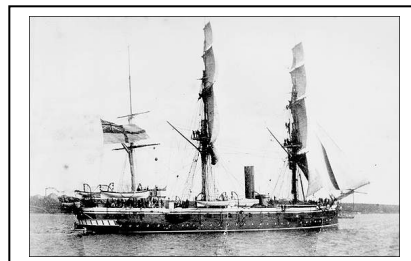
**However, the Drill Register of HMS 'Calypso' shows him to have undergone a single twenty-eight day period of training in 1910, from October 30 until November 26. Why he was not to continue in later years is not recorded although, as seen further below, he would possibly have been under-age at the time.*

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(Preceding page: 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’ and her sister-ships would soon be out-classed by newer vessels. – This Royal Navy photograph was taken prior to 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.)

***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.

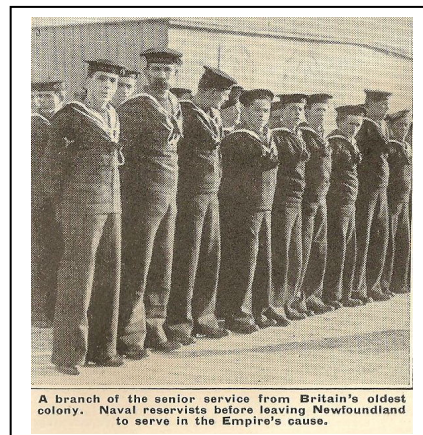
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(Right: *Recruits of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) seen here in front of HMS 'Calypso'. The shed-like superstructure seen behind them had been built onto the ship in 1902 to serve as a drill-hall. Whether the vessel was still 'Calypso', or had become 'Briton' by this time (see further below) is not clear. – photograph from Newfoundland Provincial Archives via Wikipedia)*



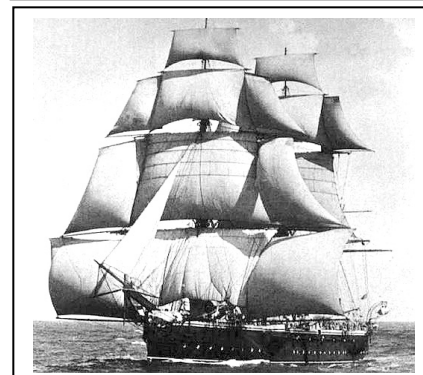
Expenses were apparently defrayed for the most part by the British (Imperial) Government and an attempt was made to ensure the number of recruits would be kept constantly at a maximum. This practice and policy was then to be continued up until the onset of hostilities some twelve years later.

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, 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 above: *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 by the Royal Navy in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)*



At some time during the period of three weeks following his arrival at *Calypso* there was a promotion of John Walter Dyke to the rank of seaman. As his scant records only suggest that he had been a new recruit, what his duties were to be during those twenty-two days is not certain* although he was likely in training. But on September 5 he was to be seconded to the fledgling Royal Canadian Navy and to board the cruiser HMCS *Niobe* which at the time was in St. John's Harbour awaiting a detachment of the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve.

(Preceding page: ‘Niobe’, seen here in St. John’s Harbour, was ceded by Great Britain to Canada on September 6 of 1910 to be the country’s main naval vessel on its east coast. Superfluous to Royal Navy needs, she was an elderly...‘1st Class Armoured Diadem Cruiser’...of eleven-thousand tons, armed with numerous guns, thirty-two altogether, and two torpedo-tubes. However, by October of 1915 ‘Niobe’ was worn out, to be disarmed and relegated to the role of harbour-service and headquarters ship in the harbour at Halifax see below). – from the William Herbert Rose and Marmaduke Rose collection (Courtesy of Bud (Donald Rose) and in the *For Posterity’s* sake – an RCN Historical Project web-site)

****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 oft-times waived.***

(Right: A naval tender carry Newfoundland Reservists from HMS ‘Calypso’ to HMCS ‘Niobe*’. – The photograph by *The Evening Telegram* is from the *Provincial Archives*.)



****Some sources refer to the ship – in 1914 - as HMS ‘Niobe’, but as of September 6, 1910, she was HMCS ‘Niobe’.***

By the time that the detachment of just over one-hundred Newfoundland Reservists* was to join the ship’s complement on that September 5, HMCS *Niobe* had already started her war-time service**

****They were apparently needed as when *Niobe* was being re-fitted and readied for war, many of her crew had been ordered to Canada’s west coast and were unavailable when the ship herself had been prepared to sail after her repairs.***

*****Some few Reservists are recorded on their service records as having joined HMCS ‘Niobe’ on October 15 but this is highly unlikely as ‘Niobe’ had contact with two Royal Navy ships off New York as late as a quarter past six on the evening of October 13. Moreover, the discharge register of HMS ‘Calypso’ documents that September 5 was indeed the date on which some of these men joined ‘Niobe’ – the records of the others appear to be absent from the register.***

HMCS *Niobe*’s first duty after having absorbed the Newfoundland Reservists into her crew was to escort the Royal Canadian Regiment from Halifax on its passage to Hamilton, Bermuda, where it was to become the island’s garrison. This mission accomplished, the ship sailed northwards to patrol the waters of the Cabot Strait and the Straits of Belle Isle, a task she shared with a Royal Navy cruiser, HMS *Lancaster*.

Following this episode of but a few weeks, by mid-October of 1914 she was working with the Royal Navy’s 4th Cruiser Squadron, also known as *Force ‘H’*, which was responsible for the inspection of shipping off the east coast of the United States and as far south as the West Indies.

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The United States was a neutral country at the time – she did not join the conflict until April of 1917 – and thus this patrolling and policing of the western Atlantic was the burden of the Royal Navy during the first years of the *Great War* as was the blockading of German shipping in American harbours. The job involved intercepting merchant ships of all flags, the inspection of cargoes and at times the boarding and the escorting thereof under armed guard of shipping to an Allied – or Associated – port.

This often also involved a great deal of boredom with the exception, perhaps, of the few days – every three weeks or so – when the patrol ships put into Halifax or, rarely, Bermuda for re-fuelling and replenishing of other supplies.

HMCS *Niobe* was already an elderly ship and the continuous effort of those several months resulted in a worn-out ship. Thus when she returned to Halifax in July of 1915, it was decided that she should remain there to become a depot ship and headquarters for the other, smaller, ships of the Royal Canadian Navy on Canada's east coast. She was to remain in Halifax for the remainder of the conflict.

The Newfoundlanders of the Royal Naval Reserve were then to return to St. John's to serve on HMS *Calypso*, some for only a short period of duty, before being dispatched overseas to the United Kingdom and thence to ships of the Royal Navy.

Seaman Dyke's Service Record shows that he was re-registered on the nominal roll of HMS *Calypso* on September 1 of 1915 – although this may have been partially only on paper. Some three weeks later he was on his way once more.

He was a seaman of the draft of one-hundred forty-four Royal Navy Reserve personnel which was to travel across the island of Newfoundland to Port-aux-Basques likely overnight on September 23-24, 1915. The detachment then embarked on the Reid Newfoundland vessel, the SS *Kyle*, for passage to North Sydney where the ship docked on the morrow at ten minutes past five in the morning.

From there the Reservists were to travel by the *Inter-Continental Railway* to Québec City where they would be taken on board the SS *Sicilian* arriving from Montreal on her commercial route across the Atlantic to Liverpool.

(Right: *The image of the SS Sicilian at anchor(?) just off-shore is from the WikiTree web-site.*)



It was likely at the end of the first week of October, 1915, and having disembarked in that English port-city, that the Naval Reservists would thereupon have been either dispatched directly to a vessel or ordered to undergo further training – or otherwise 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 coast of England.

In the case of Seaman Dyke, not having immediately been attached to a vessel, HMS *Pembroke I* (see below) was the establishment to which he was directed and where he was to remain until likely the end of the second week of November of that same year –

although exactly what his occupations, apart from waiting, were to be during this period of wearing a cap-band emblazoned *HMS Pembroke* has not been made clear.

**There was also a series of ships named 'Pembroke', the last several of which were used as depot ships and for harbour service at Chatham. This is the 'HMS Pembroke' found on the cap-bands of the sailors who served there perhaps in their thousands - but who were never to set eyes on the actual ship in question.*

(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)



Naval discipline being distinct in some ways from the laws that governed other parties such as the Army and civilians, sailors had to be on the books of a serving naval vessel to be legally subject to naval law and order, even when these sailors were serving on land.

Thus the presence of elderly and obsolescent vessels that plied the waters adjacent to the many naval land establishments which were known as stone frigates. The ships were in theory the home ships of the tens, hundreds, even thousands of men working on shore.

Seaman Dyke was to serve for twelve weeks at *Pembroke I* before the awaited summons was to come. And when it did, on December 16-17 of 1915, he was to be dispatched not to a ship but to another stone frigate, *President III*.

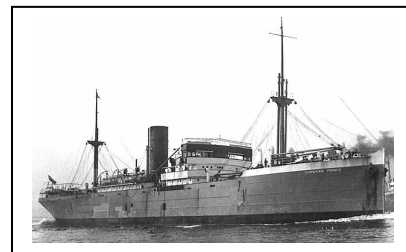
This Royal Navy facility had initially been in London where the original, floating, *President* had opened as a drill-ship for recruits of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. *President III*, one of several Divisions to emerge as the *Great War* progressed, would deal primarily with finances and accountancy, its offices at times located outside the capital city.

However, while it is unlikely that Seaman Dyke was to become involved with the finances of the Royal Navy, it would appear that neither was he to become involved with shipping as his next move was a transfer on April 10-11 back from *President III* to *Pembroke I*, on this occasion to remain there for ninety-seven days until July 17.

He was to return to *President III* on July 18 and to remain on the establishment's nominal roll for ten months, although there is just a suggestion that during his tenure there, on or about February 1, he was promoted to the rank of (*Acting*) Leading Seaman. There is also the word '*Demobilized*' found on his service record which, in other cases, appears to imply a period of furlough at home, but the author has thus far been unable to find any further evidence that such was the case.

But by that February 1, 1917, he had gone to sea on a carrier-ship, the *Saint Ninian* and was possibly already on his way back from Algeria with a cargo of iron pyrites for the steel-making industries along the River Tees. Six days later, on February 7, already within five kilometres of the English coast the ship stopped to rescue the survivors of the *Corsican Prince* which had been torpedoed by the German submarine, UB-34.

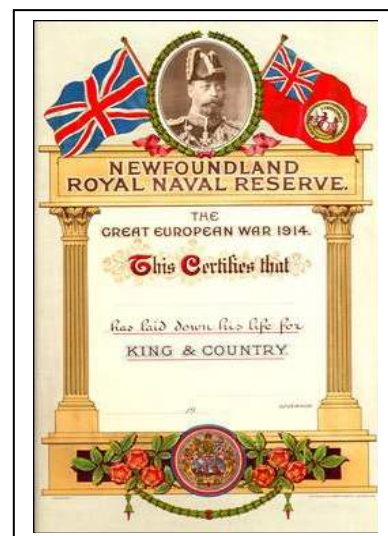
Saint Ninian in her turn was also then torpedoed, although different sources name different culprits: the aforesaid UB-34 and the UB-48. It possibly matters not: fifteen members of Leading Seaman Dyke's ship were to perish. He was one of that number.



(Right: *In the absence of a photograph of 'St. Ninian', this is one of the 'Corsican Prince' for which 'St. Ninian' had stopped to pick up survivors and then subsequently torpedoed and sunk. – It is from the Wrecksite.eu web-site via Google.*)

The son of William Dyke (former fisherman, deceased on June 23, 1916, of a *heart block*) and of Elizabeth Ann Dyke (née *Brown**, deceased on March 29, 1897 of bronchitis and pneumonia) of Bishop's Harbour on the Eastport Peninsula, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Eric and step-brother to Edward-James, Adelaide (cited as his next-of-kin), Richard and to Catherine-Mary.

**The couple had been married in the community of Salvage on March 26, 1892. William had previously been married to Mary Ann (maiden-name not found), likely before mid-1878.*



(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*)

Leading Seaman Dyke was recorded as having died in the...*sinking of the SS Saint Ninian*...on February 2 of 1917 at twenty-six years of age: date of birth at Bishop's Harbour, District of Bonavista Bay, Newfoundland, September 19, 1893 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register), but also December 18/ 19, 1891, in Royal Navy records.



(Right: *The photograph of Seaman (possibly Leading Seaman) Dyke during his time of service on HMCS 'Niobe' – see his cap-band - is from the Canadian Virtual War Memorial, Veteran's Affairs, Canada, donated by the Dyke family of Eastport.*)

Leading Seaman Dyke served only in the Royal Navy and was not in the service of Canada – only seconded - as is cited in some sources, notably the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.



Leading Seaman John Walter Dyke 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 22, 2023.