



Leading Seaman Zebulum (also found as *Zabulon* and *Zebulon*) Fowlow, Number 877x, lies in Hull Western Cemetery, eastern England.

Having decided to volunteer for the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland), Zebulum Fowlow had initially presented himself for enlistment on March 20 of 1903, whereupon he was to undergo a twenty-eight day period of training which was to commence on that same date. He also began his career as a Naval Reservist with a service number different from the one cited above: his earlier records identify him as Number 4965, later, perhaps at his re-enrollment (see immediately below), to become Number 877x.

According to some of the earlier papers documenting the first of the Naval Reservists, Zebulum Fowlow was the one-hundred eighth volunteer to register when he first was engaged in 1903.

The majority of pre-War volunteers had joined-up for five years; having done likewise and having fulfilled that first five-year commitment, Zebulum Fowlow was to subsequently re-enlist on March 21 of 1908 and – with minor contradictions to this information found in other sources – was to undertake his twenty-eight day training obligations during four of the following five years until 1912. Nothing then seems to have been documented a *propos* his training in either 1913 or 1914 or of his participation in anything else with the Reserve until the events of the summer of 1914 dictated otherwise.

Apparently not summoned from home *to service* by *Royal Proclamation* until some three months following the British *Declaration of War* on August 4 of that 1914, Zebulum Fowlow was to travel from his family residence at Trinity to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on November 5 of 1914, he is documented once again as having reported...*to duty*...to the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that above-mentioned early November day, Zebulum Fowlow was signed on for wartime service*. It appears not to be recorded whether it would be at this time that he was to attest, pledging his allegiance** to the King-Emperor, George V.

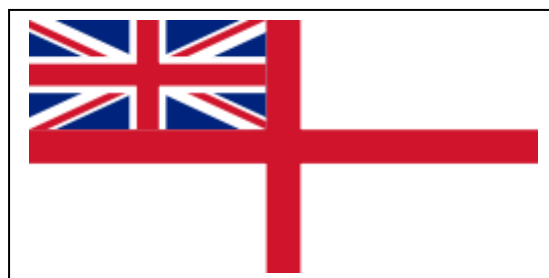
**In the early days of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist. Later recruits – as of or about May of 1916 - signed on for the 'Duration' at the time of their original enlistment*

***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 in the uniform of an Admiral of the Fleet is from the Royal Collection Trust web-site, taken in or about 1935.*)

(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.*)

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***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 short-lived 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, 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.

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(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 by the Royal Navy in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)



Seaman Fowlow's scant personal file documents him leaving for service overseas on the same day that he reported to duty in the city, November 5-6. He departed from St. John's as one of the draft of three-hundred five reservists who embarked at that time onto the Cunard passenger-liner 'Franconia', the ship having arrived from New York, for trans-Atlantic passage to the United Kingdom.

(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 troops at the time, but out of her 314 crew members, 12 died. – image from Wikipedia)



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 – or simply to await further orders - at various Royal Navy establishments and thus, likely having journeyed by train, reported to these bases on or about November 15-16.

It would seem that Seaman Fowlow was to be one of this latter category as he was transferred to HMS *Pembroke* upon his disembarkation. *Pembroke* was the land-based Royal Naval establishment at Chatham on the River Medway, itself a tributary of the better-known River Thames, in the county of Kent. Not only was *Pembroke* a barracks – it operated as such from 1878 until 1983 – but it was the name given to a number of training establishments – a goodly number during the *War* - most not far-removed from Chatham, and which were numbered according to the purpose of the training – or otherwise - involved.

Pembroke I was the training station for regular seamen and also the location of those holding-barracks from where already-trained seamen would sooner or later be attached to one of His Majesty's ships. Thus it may well have been *Pembroke I* to which Seaman Fowlow was to be posted .

***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 many of whom were never to set eyes on the actual ship in question.**

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 elderly and obsolescent vessels that plied the waters adjacent to the many naval land establishments – and known as stone frigates – were in theory the home ships of the tens, hundreds, thousands of men who laboured on shore.

Which is why Seaman Fowlow would likely have worn an HMS ‘Pembroke’ cap-band.

(Right: A few of the impressive buildings 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 Fowlow was to be kept on Pembroke’s books for some nineteen weeks*, at which time he was to be transferred, on March 17-18, from apparently shore-based service at HMS Pembroke to the harbour-service and base ship HMS Wildfire, at the not-distant harbour at Sheerness, Isle of Sheppey, in the county of Kent and on the River Thames where he was then and there to serve just less than eleven months.

****This period included the time that he had spent on the SS ‘Franconia’ while traversing the Atlantic en route to the United Kingdom.***

Just to add to the reader’s confusion, HMS Wildfire was not only the name of the ship on which the administration of the Sheerness naval establishment was undertaken, but was also the name given to the entire base. Thus it is not clear given that his Service Record shows that he was attached to Wildfire, whether Seaman Fowlow was to be working on the water or on the land*.



****However, wherever he may have served, it was not to be anywhere which was considered to be a theatre of war as evidenced by his medal record (There is no 1914-1915 Star).***

(Right above: The sloop HMS ‘Nymph’, built for the Royal Navy in 1888 – and powered by both steam and sail - was to serve mainly on the Pacific Station until her recall and retirement in 1906 when she was re-named as ‘Wildfire’. She was then stationed as the base ship at Sheerness until 1916 when she was posted to nearby Chatham and again re-named. The Navy sold her to a breaker in 1920. – The photograph of her as HMS Nymph is from the Wikipedia web-site.)

There appear to have been no notable incidents reported during Seaman Fowlow’s tenure at – or on – HMS Wildfire. On February 2-3 of 1916 he was ordered returned to HMS Pembroke.

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During the following months it was decided that Seaman Fowlow was deserving of a month's furlough back in Newfoundland and thus a letter dated July 16 of 1916 was sent to the Officer Commanding HMS *Briton* (Ex-HMS *Calypso*) in St. John's to inform him that this would shortly come to pass once passage had been arranged for Seaman* Fowlow and for two fellow Reservists. It was also noted that upon their return to the United Kingdom they were to be dispatched to the Naval Barracks at HMS *Pembroke*, Chatham.

**The date on which he would be promoted to the rank of (Acting) Leading Seaman appears not to have been documented in his papers. We shall suppose it having been from about this time.*

He is next recorded some four months later on the passenger list of the SS *Northland* as one of a party of one-hundred twenty-seven Newfoundland Reservists as it was making its way back to the United Kingdom. The group sailed from Quebec and was documented as having arrived in Liverpool on December 1 of 1916.

Having thus returned from Newfoundland to *Pembroke*, it was to be only a matter of days before, on December 5-6 (Acting Leading) Seaman Fowlow was then transferred to yet another Royal Navy land-based establishment, HMS *President III*.

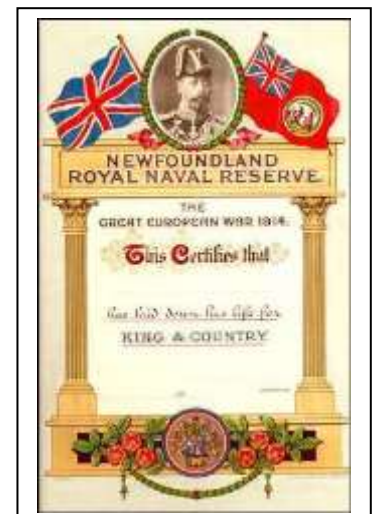
This last above-mentioned Royal Navy establishment had initially been located in London where the original – floating – *President* had been opened in 1862 to serve as a drill-ship for recruits of the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve. *President III*, however, was not another vessel but one of several Divisions to evolve as the *Great War* progressed and was to deal primarily with ships' finances and accountancy, its offices at times located outside the capital city.

(Right: *Just prior to the period of (Leading) Seaman Fowlow's posting to HMS President III, the sloop HMS 'Buzzard' had taken on the mantle of HMS 'President' although whether or not Seaman Marsh would have set foot on her deck – or even seen her – is not clear. She was a sister-ship of HMS 'Nymph' – later 'Wildfire' – as seen further above. – photograph from Wikipedia*)



What (Acting Leading) Seaman Fowlow's duties were to be at *President III* is not documented among his personal papers and it is perhaps doubtful that he were particularly involved in *President III's* financial and accounting activities. From various sources, however, it appears that the Division was at least partially responsible for the posting of seamen to, for the most part, merchant vessels which may have been in need of the seamanship that Royal Navy personnel could offer.

It is suggested in his records that January 31 – February 1 of 1917 may have been the date on which he joined – or was ordered to join – the ship *Kilpeno*.



To do so he would have likely travelled northward as that was where he was soon to die. The ship *Kilpeno*, apart from being identified as a steamship, has proved difficult to trace and what his tasks were to be once on board her have not been recorded (but see further below).

The naval-history.net copy of Royal Navy records cites the following incident of February 22, 1917: *FOWLOW, Zebulom, Act/Leading Seaman, Newfoundland RNR, X 877, illness*. Elsewhere his death is recorded as an *accidental drowning* in the Albert Dock, Liverpool, but no further information appears to be available.

(Preceding page: *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*)

However, a more complete table of Navy records has his death occurring in Scotland.

Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's husband and consort, was a planner and builder and his legacy proves it. Amongst his multiple contributions to British Industry and trade was a number of 'Albert Docks': in Liverpool as has been seen; in London; in Hull where (Acting) Leading Seaman Fowlow is buried; and also at Leith, Edinburgh, where the Royal Navy records that he...*drowned having fallen overboard* from the SS *Kilpeno*.

(Right: *The Albert Dock in the Scottish port of Leith as seen in a photograph from as late as 1960 although apparently the overall appearance of the area had not changed much by that date. – photograph from the canmore.org.uk website*)



The son of Mathias Fowlow, fisherman, and of Susannah Fowlow (née Locke) of Trinity East, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Ann-Maria, Aaron, Richard-William, George and to Bertha-Crocker.

(Acting) Leading Seaman Zebulum Fowlow was reported as having...*drowned...* on February 21 or 22, 1917, or of...*illness...* on the same date while serving on the SS *Kilpeno*, at the age of thirty-three years: date of birth in Pease Cove, Trinity Bay, Newfoundland, July 30, 1884 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).

(Acting) Leading Seaman Fowlow 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.

(Acting) Leading Seaman Zebulum Fowlow was entitled 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 20, 2023.