



Seaman James Hunt, Number 1986x, was buried in Haslar Royal Naval Cemetery, Gosport: Grave reference, E. 38.3..

Answering the call for volunteers by the naval authorities for the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland), James Hunt relinquished his likely occupation of fisherman and

travelled from his home in the Bonavista Bay community of Fair Island to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, there on December 14 of the year 1915 to report to the Reserve training ship HMS *Calypso* moored in the harbour.

On that December 14 he enlisted for the first time into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for the...*Duration of the War*...and underwent the mandatory medical assessment at the same time. James Hunt also likely attested on that day, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V.

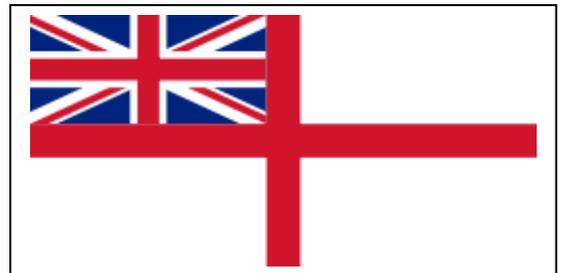
(Right: George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India: as a boy and young man he had served in the Royal Navy from 1877 until 1891 and always retained a fondness for the Senior 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' 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.)

**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.*

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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.



(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)

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.



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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(Preceding page: *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 shown 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)*

Having been promoted from the rank of *Seaman Recruit* on an unrecorded date, Seaman Hunt was to serve on HMS *Calypso* until January 30 of that year of 1916 at which time the vessel was re-commissioned as HMS *Briton*. He was then to remain on *Briton* awaiting a call to *overseas service* for a further seventy-two days.

The records show that he was struck off the books of HMS *Briton* on April 23 of that year and transferred to the nominal roll of *Vivid I* (see below) on the following day, April 24. Thus a certain number of the days attached to *Vivid I* were not spent at *Vivid* but on a ship crossing the Atlantic from Newfoundland to the United Kingdom.



That ship was the SS *Pretorian*, an *Allan Line* ship – the Company if not the vessel itself well-known in St. John's – which since 1904 had been running the commercial route between Glasgow and the Canadian ports of Québec and Montréal, and had perhaps deviated from it to embark the naval reservist draft on that occasion. The vessel sailed from St. John's en route to the United Kingdom on or about that April 23, 1916.

(Right above: *This un-dated photograph of the Allan Line ship SS 'Pretorian' in the Prince's Dock in the Scottish City of Glasgow is from the web-site 'Tangled Roots and Trees' in which it is shown by courtesy of the Graham Lappin Collection.*)

If the experience of previous reservists was then followed, once the draft with which Seaman Hunt travelled had landed in the United Kingdom – was it in Glasgow? - several of the men would have been posted directly to a ship. Others would have been ordered to undergo further training – or simply to wait - at various Royal Navy establishments mostly around the coast of southern England and thus, likely having journeyed by train, they likely reported to these bases on or about May 2 or 3.

As seen above, Seaman Hunt's destination was to be HMS *Vivid I**, a Division of the Royal Navy port and its facilities at Plymouth-Devonport on the south coast of England.

(Right: *A no-longer bustling Devonport Harbour, today bereft of its former importance – photograph from 2012)*



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***The Royal Navy had a disciplinary system which in certain ways differed from civil – and even Army – law; but for it to be employed, a sailor had to be attached to a ship. While at sea, of course, this posed no problem, but when a sailor was performing duties on land that were not associated directly to a particular ship he still had to be held accountable for any untoward behaviour.**

The Navy's training establishments were for the most part on land: Devonport (although apparently only a shore base and a holding-barracks for seamen awaiting postings during the Great War), Chatham, and Portsmouth for example, were terrestrial facilities for many thousands of naval personnel, some of who were permanently stationed there. Thus the practice became to base an elderly or even obsolete ship in the nearby port to be, nominally, the vessel to which this personnel was to be attached. This appears to have been the procedure for the large number of shore bases organized around the coast of the United Kingdom during the Great War.

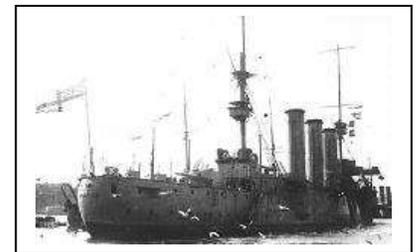
HMS 'Vivid', the base to which Seaman Hunt had been ordered after his arrival in the United Kingdom from Newfoundland, was not only all the buildings and facilities on shore, but also a small, elderly, nondescript depot ship (originally HMS 'Cukoo', built 1873), to which all the naval personnel was officially attached and which was the name to be emblazoned on the bands of the seaman's cap.

These establishments were at times divided into sections: the holding barracks at 'Vivid I' was where the seamen (as opposed to engine-room personnel, for example, who were sent to 'Vivid II') such as Seaman Hunt – as well as those who were to be trained in signalling and telegraphy - were initially to be stationed while awaiting a posting to one of His Majesty's ships.



(Right above: A main gateway to the once-Royal Navy establishment at Plymouth-Devonport – photograph from 2011(?))

On June 16-17 of 1916, Seaman Hunt was ordered transferred to a ship to which he would remain attached for the next twenty-six months, until August of 1918: the Kent-class cruiser HMS *Berwick* which carried the name of a Scottish county and was a ship of the 4th Cruiser Squadron whose responsibilities were the waters of the North America Station and the West Indies.



(Right above: HMS 'Berwick', launched as late as September of 1902, was nonetheless, because of the cascade of technological advances of the time, obsolescent by the end of the Great War and was to be broken up in 1922 – in Germany, ironically enough. – photograph from the *naval-history.net* website)

When Seaman Hunt was recorded as having officially joined *Berwick's* complement, the ship was in dock at Birkenhead, the port adjacent to Liverpool, where she was undergoing an important re-fit and upgrading, and also where the configuration of a number of her

six-inch guns, the ship's major weaponry, was to be modified. It would appear that she was never subsequently to fire those guns in anger.

After a number of trials of her recent conversions and additions, and the replenishment of supplies, ammunition, water and fuel – she burned coal – on July 13 of 1916 the cruiser sailed for Halifax from where she was then to take up her prescribed station.

The exact nature of Seaman Hunt's service on board the vessel appears not to have been documented, but many – although not all – of the happenings of that two-year period are to be found recorded in the ship's log-books. What they show are days, weeks and months of routine spent in the waters of the western Atlantic, of the Caribbean and of the coast of north-eastern South America – this to be interspersed with occasional returns to Halifax and other, less frequent, journeys back to the United Kingdom – but little else.

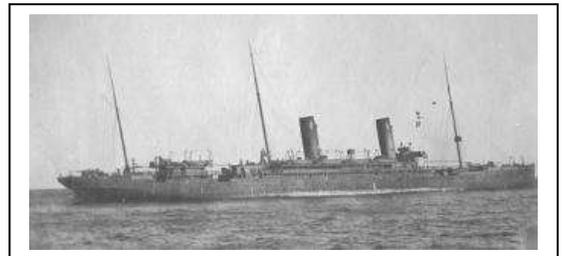
HMS *Berwick's* duties included patrolling off the eastern seaboard of the United States as the country was not to become involved in the conflict until April of 1917. Even so, the vessel and Seaman Hunt were to visit both Chesapeake Bay and the Hampton Roads, not only during this, the first year of his service on board *Berwick*, but also well into the second.

Thus it was that from Bermuda in the north to Cartagena, Columbia, on to Caracao of the Dutch West Indies, and to the Demerara River of British Guyana in the south, with more or less well-known places such as St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Martinique, Barbados, Jamaica, the Bahamas also to be visited, not only in turn but on several occasions, the patrolling continued, all without – according to the same log-books – any interest shown in them by the enemy.

Even the above-mentioned returns to Halifax and crossings of the Atlantic Ocean to England and to Ireland were apparently without incident and in early August of 1918 she entered the River Thames and turned into the docks at Chatham where, on the nineteenth day of the month, she was paid off: i.e. taken out of *active service* and her officers and crew dismissed.

On that August 20 Seaman Hunt was received back on the books and nominal roll of *Vivid III* at Plymouth-Devonport where he was then to remain for two months until October 23. At this point he was again posted to a ship, on this occasion His Majesty's Armed Merchant Cruiser *Teutonic*, his arrival there on the above date being recorded as...*9.0am: 27 ratings joined ship from RNB Devonport.*

A *White Star Line* passenger ship of some ten-thousand tons, *Teutonic* had been the first such ship to be requisitioned and converted to serve as an armed merchant cruiser. Having begun her war-time service as a vessel of the 10th Cruiser Squadron (also known as the *Northern Patrol*) she was later to serve as an escort for ships sailing to the Russian White Sea port of Archangel.



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(Preceding page: *The photograph of His Majesty's Armed Merchant Cruiser Teutonic is from the naval-history.net website.*)

Then in 1918 she began serving as a troop-transport and as an escort for trans-Atlantic and other convoys*, a task that *Teutonic* had apparently just completed prior to Seaman Hunt's detachment of twenty-seven ratings arriving in Liverpool from Devonport on October 23 to join her.

**The author has noticed that one of the ships with which on October 7 Teutonic had close contact was the troop transport 'Huntsend' which at the time was carrying troops – including members of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment – many of whom were already infected with the so-called Spanish 'Flu and some of whom who were soon to die because of it. This contact may have been of some relevance to the case of Seaman Hunt.*

HMS *Teutonic* was to sail from the port of Liverpool on October 26, but although her log-books record some brief work with another convoy, they appear not to say whether it was incoming or outgoing. What is more, there is no log available for the month of November and it is not impossible that any and, of course, perhaps all of her orders were to change at eleven o'clock on the morning of November 11.

All that may be said for sure is that by November 29 *Teutonic* was back in port, likely having had at least one very sick seaman on board – in fact, by October 31, the last day of log-book records available, there had been fifteen.

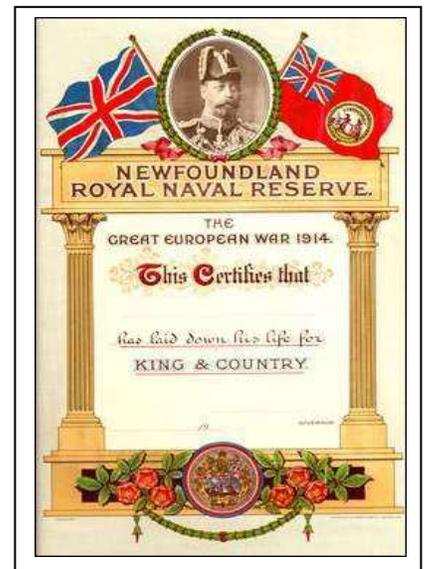
During the *Great War* there was a goodly number of hospitals in and about the naval establishment at Plymouth-Devonport. Seaman Hunt's Service Records cite a *Harbour Hospital* as the one into which he was admitted but that name does not figure among those found in the records – although it may well have been the Royal Hospital, Haslar, in the grounds of which he was later to be buried.

On November 30, Seaman Hunt was bureaucratically transferred from HMS *Teutonic* to HMS *Vivid III*, but this, as seen before, is only the *official* date and he may well have landed and travelled back to *Vivid III* by this time – although this is again speculation.

The son of Abraham Hunt, fisherman, and of Keran Lappuck (but also spelled variously elsewhere) Hunt (née *Brown**) of Fair Island, Bonavista Bay, he was also younger brother to Lydia.

**The couple had been married in the community of Badger's Quay on December 22, 1885. After his wife's passing, Abraham was later, on May 10, 1903, to marry Jessie Jane Gibbons, widow; the couple would parent Keren, Jacob and Stephen.*

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(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*)

Seaman James Billet Hunt was recorded as having died in hospital of pneumonia on December 3 of 1918: date of birth on Fair Island, Bonavista Bay, Newfoundland, September 18, 1895 (from his enlistment papers) but September 25, 1895 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register, as is the name *Billet*).

Seaman Hunt 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 James Hunt was entitled to the British War Medal and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



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 21, 2023.