

HURLEY, T



Seaman Thomas Hurley, Number 1233x, 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 as a fisherman, Thomas Hurley answered the call of the Naval Authorities and travelled from the community of Gander Bay to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on October 14 of 1915, he reported...*to duty*...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that October 14 Thomas Hurley would enlist for the first time into the Reserve (see further below) – although there is a suggestion that he was already a sailor thereof – and was signed on to undertake a five-year term of service* before undergoing a satisfactory medical assessment on the morrow. Again on October 14 he was to begin a twenty-eight day period of training which was to conclude on November 11 but which, apparently went unfinished (see below).

It is also likely that Thomas Hurley was to attest at this time, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V.

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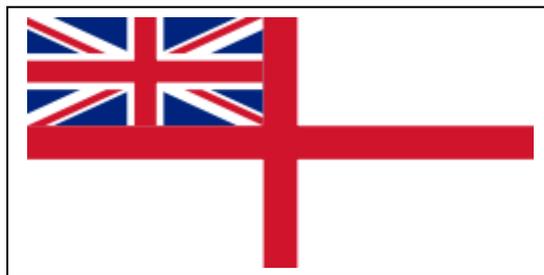


(Preceding page: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India: as a boy and young man he had served in the Royal Navy from 1877 until 1891 and always retained a fondness for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

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.



(Preceding page: 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 of her by the Royal Navy, taken in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)

Following those mid-autumn three weeks and a day of training and service* spent in St. John's, Seaman Hurley, promoted by this time from the rank of seaman recruit and one of a draft of three-hundred nine Naval Reservists and officers, embarked on November 5-6 onto the Cunard vessel *Franconia*, arrived in St. John's from New York on her trans-Atlantic way to Liverpool.



(Right above: 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. She was not carrying any troops at the time, but out of her 314 crew members, 12 died. – the photograph is from Wikipedia)

**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, as in the case of Seaman Hurley.*

Their ship then having docked in the English port-city of Liverpool on November 12, several of the Reservists were posted directly to a ship. Others were ordered to undergo further training at various Royal Navy establishments and, likely having journeyed by train, reported to these bases on or about November 13.

It would appear that Seaman Hurley was to be one of this latter category as he was transferred to HMS *Pembroke* upon his disembarkation. *Pembroke* was the 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 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 training involved.

Pembroke I was the base for regular seamen and it was likely *Pembroke I* to which Seaman Hurley was to be attached.

**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.*

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 Hurley would have worn an HMS ‘Pembroke’ hat-band.

(Right above: 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 Hurley was...*on strength...at Pembroke* - this was to include the days spent crossing the Atlantic – for ninety-four days, from November 6 of 1914 until February 8 of the following year, 1915. What exactly were to be his duties while there appears not to have been recorded but on that February 8-9 he was transferred to north of the River

Thames to the county of Suffolk and to the stone-frigate *Ganges* in the vicinity of the village of Shotley and the not-distant port of Harwich.

Once again it is not clear exactly what his duties were during the almost nine months that he was stationed there. HMS *Ganges*, as recounted above, was similar to the other land-based establishments in that there was also a ship of the same name, *Ganges*, to which all the personnel at Shotley and Harwich was nominally attached.

But of course, even though the ship in question was elderly and had little value as a ship of the Royal Navy, it was manned by a crew...and it is not clear whether or not Seaman Hurley of the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve was to serve at HMS *Ganges* the land-based establishment, or on HMS *Ganges* the ship.



(Right: HMS 'Ganges' (ex – 'Minotaur'), harbour service and base ship at Shotley as of 1913, was a wooden iron-clad vessel, built in 1863, of 10,690 tons. She was eventually sold in 1922. – from Wikipedia)

From HMS *Ganges* Seaman Hurley returned on November 2, 1915, to *Pembroke I*, the Division which trained and also held already-trained personnel until such time as the Navy could avail of their services. In the case of Seaman Hurley the call to...*active service*...was to come after exactly twenty-one weeks, on March 27, 1916.

He was thereupon posted to HMS *Macedonia*, one of the many passenger and cargo vessels which, during the *Great War*, were to be requisitioned by the British Admiralty and converted and armed for use as search and escort vessels. The date documented is March 27 of 1916, but it seems that this may have been the day on which he left *Pembroke I* to join his new ship.



Apparently his new ship, His Majesty's Armed Merchant Cruiser *Macedonia*, was at the time floating on the waters of the Rio Plato, the *River Plate*, on the border between the countries of Argentina and Uruguay.

(Right above: The image of 'Macedonia' is from the 'Old Ship Picture Galleries' web-site. A vessel of ten-thousand, five hundred tons, she was built in 1904 for the 'Pacific & Orient Line' before being commissioned on August 2, two days prior to the entry of the British into the Great War. Thereupon re-fitted and armed with eight 4.7-inch naval guns – later, by the time of Seaman Hurley's arrival, changed to eight 6-inch guns, she was sent on patrol to the South Atlantic.)

During her war-time career she was to visit such places as the island of St. Vincent, Cape Verde, South Africa, the Falkland Islands, Rio de Janiero, Montevideo, Ascension Island, Brazil and points in-between. She was to leave the United Kingdom – Liverpool – on February 8 of 1915, not to return to Great Britain until she escorted a convoy into Newport, Wales, on April 30 of 1918.

As recounted above, *Macedonia* was in the *River Plate* on March 27, 1916, doing nothing much in particular. There is no report on that day of any additions to her crew. There had been nine ratings join in December, some three months before, but the ship's log books appear to be void of any further arrivals afterwards until May 25 when eight further ratings reported from HMS *Glasgow*, a cruiser whose services included bringing the mail.

It may thus well be that it was on either on the December or the May date – however unlikely - that Seaman Hurley first set foot on the deck of his new ship.

There was not a great deal to report aboard *Macedonia* during those first eight months of 1916 other than the routine tasks: a sailing to Simonstown, South Africa, for a five week-long visit for maintenance; the return voyage of just under four weeks via Ascension Island to the coaling-station on the Brazilian *Abrolhos Islands* (to the British the *Abrolhos Rocks*); after a few days steaming southwards, the month of March then spent in the *River Plate* in the vicinity of Montevideo; two days at sea to the Falkland Islands for a week spent at the capital, Port Stanley, before a ten-day patrol and a return via the same Port Stanley to those same *Abrolhos Rocks*.

It was then to Rio de Janiero the Argentinian playground, back to the *River Plate* for a ten-week stay, to Rio de Janiero again for but a single day, July 17, before steaming back up the South American coast to warmer climes – it was winter in the southern hemisphere of course at the time – and to the *Abrolhos Rocks* where the ship anchored in the morning of July 20 to remain there for the next two months...and from where Seaman Hurley was to go no further.

During that period there had been days spent at maintenance – scrubbing, washing, scraping, painting; the ship had collected and delivered mail and food; she had stopped, questioned and at times boarded and even taken possession of other vessels, both foreign and British; she had contacted and visited British war-ships on their way to and from the region – and in her turn been contacted and visited, although it must be remembered that Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay were neutral countries at this time and relations were at times necessarily limited.

On August 18, 1916, HMS *Macedonia* and Seaman Hurley were still at the *Abrolhos Rocks*. The entry in the ship's log-book for that day follows beneath, with the addendum re Seaman Hurley made by the researchers of *naval- history*:

18 August 1916

Abrolhos Rocks

Lat -18.1, Long -38.73

7.25am: Sent meat & mails to "Glasgow"

am: Hands employed scraping & painting

12.05pm: Departed this life Thomas Hurley, Seaman RNR (RC), Official No. Newfoundland 1233x who fell overboard whilst working with side party

4.00pm: General & evening quarters

Number on sick list 6

(continued)

[Thomas Hurley, seaman, age 25, Newfoundland Royal Navy Reserve, official no 1233X was the son of Joseph Hurley of Island Harbour, Fogo. He is commemorated on the Beaumont-Hamel Memorial, Newfoundland.]

There appears to be no information as to whether his body was recovered and if so, as to what became of it.

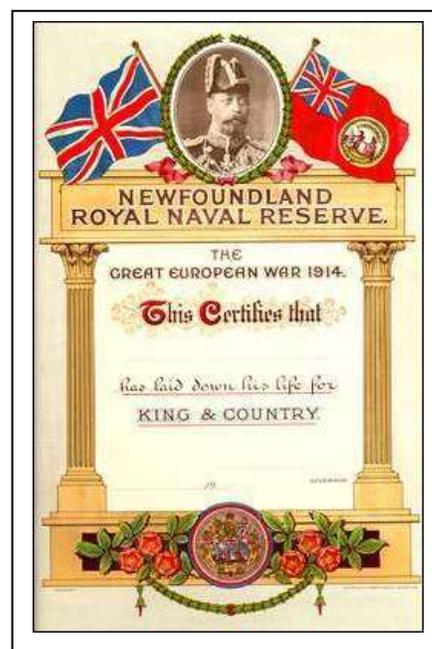
Neither is there much information – Alas! – to be gleaned from the sources available pertaining to Thomas Hurley’s early life and his immediate family. His father may have been the Joseph Hurley, occupation lumberman, found in the 1898 Business Directory for the community of Gander Bay in the District of Fogo, but of his mother, recorded as deceased by the time of her son’s enlistment, or any siblings, there appears to have been nothing documented.

The circumstances of Seaman Hurley’s death are recounted above on the preceding page. They contradict the Newfoundland Death Records and the copy available of the Newfoundland Vital Statistics of the time. It is apparently correct that he was drowned but neither on October 6 of that year, nor in the North Sea as these two sources have documented.

He died on August 18 of 1916 in the South Atlantic.

His age is also not clear as he is recorded as having died both at the age of twenty-five years and also twenty-eight years: the date of his birth is *declared* on his enlistment papers as having been January 16 of 1891 in Gander Bay, Newfoundland – a further source has the place as Island Harbour on Fogo Island.

(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)



Seaman Hurley 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 Thomas Hurley was entitled to the British War Medal and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) seen to the 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.