

MAHER. L.J.



Seaman Leo Joseph Maher, Number 2277x, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the Naval Reserve Bronze beneath the Caribou at the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

Having relinquished his occupation as a messenger with the Anglo-American Telegraph Company and living in the east end of the capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on November 8-9 of 1916 Leo Joseph Maher reported...*to duty...*at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Briton*, moored in the harbour (see below).



On that same November day 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 required medical assessment on the morrow. He also likely attested at this time, 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.)



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*****At the outset 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.

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.

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 above: *HMS 'Calypso' in full sail. She was to be re-named 'Briton' in early 1916 when a new 'Calypso', a modern cruiser, was about to be launched by the Royal Navy. – This Royal Navy photograph of the 'Newfoundland Calypso' taken in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)*



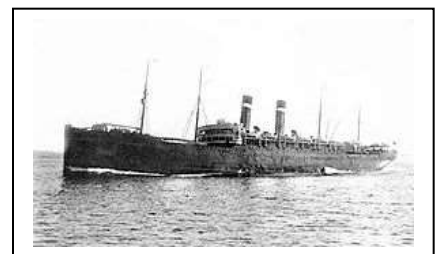
(Right: *Naval reservists from Newfoundland, during the early days of the Great War, before their departure for the United Kingdom - from The War Illustrated)*

(Right below: *The newly-constructed 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)*

Twenty-seven days later*, on December 6 of that same year, Seaman Maher – as one of a draft of fifty naval reservists and a single Chief Petty Officer - departed Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, for the United Kingdom. The transport vessel was the SS *Southland* en route from Portland, Maine, to Liverpool – the vessel had previously been called *Vaderland*, a Dutch or Belgian ship whose name had been deemed too Germanic-sounding and which later, in June of 1917, was to be torpedoed and lost while en route from Liverpool to Philadelphia.



**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 waived by 'Royal Proclamation'.*



(Right: *The photograph of the Red Star Line ship 'Vaderland' – later 'Southland' – is from the Wikipedia web-site.)*

Of course, Seaman Maher's draft had left St. John's for Halifax some days before the SS *Southland* sailed for Liverpool. But ascertaining how the reservists were to journey to there has proved to be more than difficult. There were two reasonable possibilities for a contingent of some fifty persons: by train to Port aux Basques, a ferry-ride across the Cabot Strait, and then a train journey once again on to Halifax; or there was the direct passage by ship from St. John's to Halifax – both means of transport necessitating up to three days' travel.

Whichever was to be the case, a revised schedule saw the *Southland* leave Halifax three days late, on December 6, and arrive in Liverpool eleven days afterwards again, on December 17.

Once having set foot in the United Kingdom, Naval personnel would have been either posted directly to a ship or ordered to undergo further training or to await a posting, at one of various Royal Navy establishments – these for the most part in England. In the

case of Seaman Maher, the destination was to be HMS *Victory I* at Portsmouth in the English county of Hampshire.

HMS 'Victory', like most of the so-called stone-frigates (naval establishments on shore), was three entities: it was a training establishment originally, and also a holding-barracks for seamen not only in training but awaiting a posting to one of His Majesty's ships, its facilities initially set in the naval city and port of Portsmouth; thirdly, it was also the ship to which the majority of the land-based personnel would have been, at least officially and bureaucratically – if not physically - attached**.*



At Portsmouth this vessel was HMS 'Victory', the warship from which Admiral Nelson had directed the Battle of Trafalgar – although her illustrious history is not limited to that one single incident.

**The large influx of personnel due to the War necessitated further Divisions and functions being transferred to other areas of the United Kingdom.*

(Right above: HMS 'Victory' in dry dock in the southern English port-city of Portsmouth where she has been for a century – photograph from Wikipedia)

***Naval discipline differed in some ways from civil and even Army law, and those in naval uniform, even though based on land and perhaps never to go to sea, had to be on the books of a real ship for that discipline to be applied. Thus a normally small, obsolescent and obscure vessel – 'Victory' was the exception - was used for this purely bureaucratic purpose.*

Seaman Maher was to remain stationed at *Victory I* for some five months – he was on *Victory I*'s nominal roll from the time he left Newfoundland – until May 4 of 1917 when he was ordered dispatched to HMS *Idaho*, since August of 1916 the name given to the Auxiliary Patrol and Q-ship Base at Milford Haven in the Principality of Wales*.

**As was the case at HMS 'Victory', there was also a ship of the same name to which the base personnel was attached; she was a requisitioned steam yacht, HMS 'Idaho', armed with a single one-pounder quick-firing gun and which was used at 'the Haven' during the Great War as a local patrol vessel and apparently later as a tug-boat.*

Idaho's role was also to act as a base ship, to be responsible for the personnel, the arming, fuelling, provisioning, maintenance as well as the finances of a flotilla of smaller boats, usually trawlers and drifters and the such-like which operated out of the Haven.

It was to be on one of those vessels, His Majesty's Trawler* *Carew Castle* – although the exact dates of that service appear not to be recorded among his papers – that Seaman Maher was soon to become a crew-member.



(Preceding page: *This is a sister-ship, HMT 'Cardiff Castle', to the one on which Seaman Maher was to sail. 'Carew Castle' was a two-hundred fifty ton vessel built in 1912 and which had worked out of the Welsh coastal city and harbour of Swansea. Re-fitted and equipped with a single twelve-pounder naval gun – as also seen here on 'Cardiff Castle' -, she began her war-time service as a mine-sweeper in May of 1915. – The photograph is from the Wikipedia web-site.)*



(Right adjacent: *Minelaying from a German surface vessel during the Great War: these were for the most part contact mines. U-boats were also used for this purpose – from the NavWeaps web-site)*



(Right: *A quick-firing naval twelve-pounder (the weight of the shell) and twelve hundred-weight (1200 lbs. the weight of the barrel and breech) gun such as found on HMT 'Carew Castle', here seen adapted for use in 1941. – taken at the Royal Artillery Museum 'Firepower', Woolwich, in 2010)*

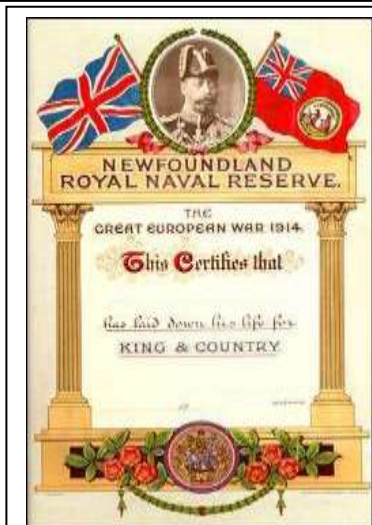
**During the War, 1456 trawlers were requisitioned from ports around the British Isles and even elsewhere of which two-hundred sixty-four were to be lost.*

There appears to be little information available a propos the sinking of HM Trawler *Carew Castle* off Hartland Point - on the north-western tip of the Devon coast. The ship struck a mine laid by the German submarine, *UBoat-47*, and was sunk with the loss of three of her crew of approximately fifteen.

The son James Maher, labourer at the City Works, and of Ellen Maher* of 5, Battery Road in St. John's, Newfoundland at the time of Leo Joseph's enlistment, he was also brother to Felix.

**Perhaps née Rumbolt*

(Right above: *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)*



Leo Joseph Maher was reported as having died on June 12, 1917, in the sinking of HM Trawler *Carew Castle* at the reported age of 19 years: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, May 10, 1898 (from his enlistment papers) but possibly May 10, 1899 in Hoylestown, St. John's (from Roman Catholic Baptismal Records) – in which case his mother was *Rumbolt*.

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(Preceding page: This memorial erected by Ellen Maher stands in the Mount Carmel Roman Catholic Cemetery in memory of her husband James and of their son Leo Joseph. – photograph, with thanks to my wife Claire, from 2022)

Seaman Maher 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 Leo Joseph Maher was entitled to the British War Medal (centre) 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.