



Leading Seaman Patrick John McKay, Number 1230x, (found on the Holyrood War Memorial as Mackey) lies in Hull Western Cemetery.

Having responded to the call for volunteers from the Naval Authorities, he thereupon travelled from his place of residence in not-distant Holyrood to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on October 13 of 1914, Patrick John McKay reported...to duty...on the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS Calypso, moored in the harbour (see below).

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The Naval Reserve Drill Register records the same October 13, 1914, as the day on which Patrick John McKay commenced his twenty-eight days of training to be followed on the morrow by the required medical assessment. At the same time he was engaged to undertake a five-year period of training which, of course, he was not to fulfil.

It is also not unlikely that Patrick John McKay on or about that same October 13, 1914, was also to attest, 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 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 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.

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.

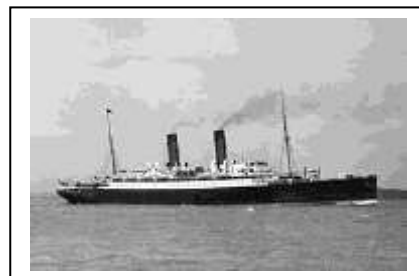


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(Preceding page: *HMS 'Calypso' in full sail. She was to be re-named 'Briton' in 1916 when a new 'Calypso', a modern cruiser, was about to be launched by the Royal Navy. – This photograph, taken by the Royal Navy in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty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

Following those mid-autumn three weeks and two days of training and service* spent in St. John's, Seaman McKay, 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 en route to Liverpool.

(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. 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 was likely the case with Seaman McKay.*

Their ship then having docked in the afore-mentioned English port-city 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 McKay 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 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 McKay 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.*

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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 McKay would 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 McKay was to be stationed at *Pembroke* for seven weeks less a day, until December 24, at which time he was to be transferred to an elderly vessel, HMS *Royalist*, which in 1913 had been re-commissioned as HMS *Colleen*.

He was apparently to report there on that Christmas Day of 1914.

As was the case with *Pembroke* at Chatham, there were two *Colleens*: one was a vessel of that name which was now the depot ship – and administrative centre – for the war-time naval base of the same name, located at Queenstown (today *Cobh*, pronounced as *Cove*) on the southern coast of Ireland*.

**Ireland at the time of the Great War was a British possession and one of the British Isles. It was during the period between the two World Wars that the country became the independent nation that it is today.*

Queenstown – named as such in 1849 for a visiting Queen Victoria – had already by that time been an important naval base since the *Napoleonic Wars* and was to remain so during the remainder of the years of British sovereignty. As one might surmise, it lost none of that importance during the years of the *Great War*.

As with most of the other vessels which shared their name with a shore-based establishment – *Pembroke*, *Vivid*, *Ceto* etc., HMS *Colleen* was not to venture out into the perils of the high seas. But there was a number of smaller vessels operating out of Queenstown for whom the depot ship was responsible in such matters as financial expenditure – crew’s wages for example -, personnel, supplies, armaments et al..



(Right above: HMS ‘Royalist’, seen here before becoming HMS ‘Colleen’, was a hybrid corvette – both sail and steam – built in 1883, and was in many ways similar to HMS ‘Calypso’ (later ‘Briton’), the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve training-ship. – photograph from Wikipedia)

It is not recorded in his files whether Seaman McKay was at any time to work on board the base ship HMS *Colleen* or at any of the accompanying land-based facilities which were also a part of HMS *Colleen*. But neither is it recorded that he was attached to any of the smaller craft, trawlers, drifters and the like, that were *Colleen's* brood – even though one of his medal (the 1914-1915 *Star*) suggests that maybe he was.

After a year less fifteen days of service, Seaman McKay terminated his stay at HMS *Colleen*. He was then to return to *Pembroke I* on December 11 to remain there for one-hundred sixteen days, a period during which he was appointed, on or about February 29, to the rank of (Acting) Leading Seaman.

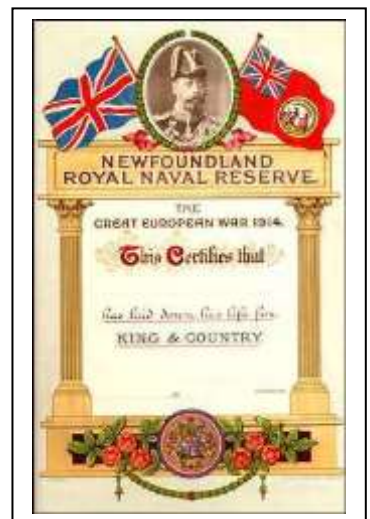
Another land-based Royal Naval establishment was then in the offing: (Leading) Seaman McKay joined *President III* on April 6 of the following year, 1916.

President III was a Division of the London-based HMS *President* which had been born as a drill-ship for the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve on the River Thames. However it was to expand, particularly as the War progressed, and *President III* was a large accounting and financial facility which operated out of several offices in different areas of the country.

However, one suspects that *President III* also provided holding facilities for seamen awaiting a posting afloat, one of which may have been in or in the area of the port-city of Hull (abbreviated from *Kingston-upon-Hull*) on the Humber River in northeastern England.

When exactly it was that Leading Seaman McKay set foot on deck of the small steamship (tanker?) SS *Stanton* appears not to have been recorded. However, it surely must have been after January 31 of 1917 as he is documented as still a presence at *President III* on this date.

(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).



Information about the steamship *Stanton* has been elusive and exactly what Leading Seaman McKay's duties were on board her appear not to have been documented – he does not seem to have had any specialty training such as signalling or gunnery. All that might be surmised is that she was in port at the time of his death as otherwise he would likely have been buried at sea.



(Right above: The image of the SS 'Stanton' is from the 'sunderlandships.com' web-site. She survived the Great War only to be torpedoed in September of 1942 by a British submarine as she was transporting gasoline from Italy to the Axis forces in North Africa.)

The records appear to be in disagreement a propos the cause of Leading Seaman McKay's death. While his own scant service records show him to have been...*Discharged*

Dead – Drowned...the naval records cite...McKAY, Patrick J, Act/Leading Seaman, Newfoundland RNR, X 1230, Stanton, steamship, 18 May 1917, illness.

The son of James McKay (but often *Mackey*), labourer, and of Bridget McKay, of Country Path(?), Holyrood, he appears to have left behind him little if any family information.

Leading Seaman Patrick John McKay was reported as having...*drowned...on April 28, 1917, or...of illness...on the same date while serving on the SS Stanton, at the age of nineteen years: date of birth in Holyrood, Newfoundland, March 14 of 1896 (from his enlistment papers).*

(Right: *The sacrifice of Seaman P. Mackey is honoured on the War Memorial which stands in the Conception Bay community of Holyrood. – photograph from 2014(?)*)



Leading Seaman McKay 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.

Leading Seaman Patrick John McKay 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 21, 2023.