

MURPHY. L.



Seaman Lawrence (also found as *Laurence*) Murphy, Number 1817x, 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, likely as a fisherman, and having travelled from the Conception Bay community of Conception Harbour, to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on March 15 of 1915 Lawrence Murphy reported...to *duty*...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that same March 15, 1915, he enlisted for the first time into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for a single year's* war-time service and likely underwent the required medical assessment at the same moment. He also possibly 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.*)



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



Some six months after having been...*taken on strength*...at 'Calypso', his sparse Service Records suggest that it was on September 22 of 1915, having by that time been promoted from the rank of *Seaman Recruit*, that the now-Seaman Murphy was on his way to the United Kingdom. There appear to be no records of what his duties had been during this period.

**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'.*

The date of departure may in fact have been September 23, the day after an *entertainment* had been held for a *large number of reservists* by the local Board of Trade. The naval personnel would then have crossed the island by train to embark onto the SS *Kyle* for passage on the night of September 24-25 from Port aux Basques to North Sydney, to arrive there at ten minutes past five in the morning.



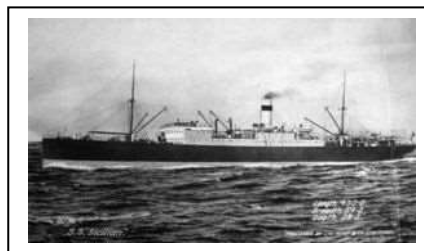
(Right: *Naval reservists from Newfoundland, during the early days of the Great War, before their departure for the United Kingdom - from The War Illustrated*)

The *Kyle's* passenger manifesto records a contingent on one-hundred forty-two reservists – Seaman *Lawrence Murphy* among that number - then undertaking the onward journey at twenty past seven a.m. after a medical inspection, via Halifax to Québec on the *Intercontinental Railway* where the draft boarded ship for the trans-Atlantic passage.

The *Discharge Register Royal Naval Reserve* appears adamant that the draft was now to board the SS *Sicilian* in Québec but there appears to be no further information in this regard available *a propos* the Newfoundland contingent*.

(Right below: *The image, likely in peace-time, of the 'Allan Line' ship 'Sicilian' is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

**While fairly accurate records have been kept for troop-transports, 'Sicilian' was not to be requisitioned as such and thus continued her commercial runs between Montréal, Québec and the United Kingdom. Any precise records of her whereabouts and doings during the war-time period are rare indeed – any of late September, 1915, are even more elusive.*



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Having arrived in the United Kingdom towards the end of the first week of that October of 1915, the Naval Reserve personnel would thereupon have been either posted directly to a ship or ordered to undergo further training – or to simply await a posting to one of His Majesty’s ships - at one of various Royal Navy establishments – these for the most part operating around the coast of England.

In the case of Seaman Murphy, the destination was to be *Pembroke I*.

HMS *Pembroke** was the Royal Navy establishment at Chatham on the River Medway, itself a tributary of the better-known River Thames, in the county of Kent. Not only was it a barracks – it operated from 1878 until 1983 – but it was the name given to a number of training establishments, mostly not far-removed from Chatham, which were numbered according to the purpose of the training – or otherwise - involved.

Pembroke I was the training station and holding-barracks for regular seamen and it was likely, as seen above, *Pembroke I* to which Seaman Murphy 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 ashore.

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

(Right above: Some of the impressive buildings of the large Royal Navy complex which was a part of 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)

On January 1-2 of 1916 Seaman Murphy was attached to HMS *Osiris*, a steam-ship of the P & O Line which at the time of Seaman Murphy’s service on her, had been re-named as *Osiris II* because, in 1916, of the appearance of a new destroyer also designated as *Osiris*.



(Right above: ‘Osiris’, a vessel of just less than two-thousand tons, was built in 1898. She had been re-fitted and armed – although no details appear to be available – for war-time service, the conversion beginning as early as August 5, the day after the British

Declaration of War. 'Osiris', later 'Osiris II', was to survive the Great War. Her image as seen above is from 'facebook.com' via 'Google'.)

Osiris the P & O steamship had been requisitioned during the first days of the Great War to serve as an armed merchant cruiser, only two months later to subsequently become a fleet messenger ship before, in April of 1915, to be ordered to operate as a depot ship (for submarines?) during the *Gallipoli Campaign* (for the Navy this episode of the War also known as the *Dardanelles*) towards the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea.



In 1916, when joined by Seaman Murphy, it would appear that *Osiris II* was still operating in the waters of the *Aegean Sea*, in which case both he and his ship may have on occasion been found in the harbour at Mudros, on the Greek island of Lemnos.

(Right above: *Mudros Bay almost a century after the time of the Gallipoli Campaign – photograph from 2011*)

(Right: *Mudros Bay – its tiny harbour full to capacity with Allied shipping during the Gallipoli Campaign – was the base of a great number of medical facilities. – from Illustration*)

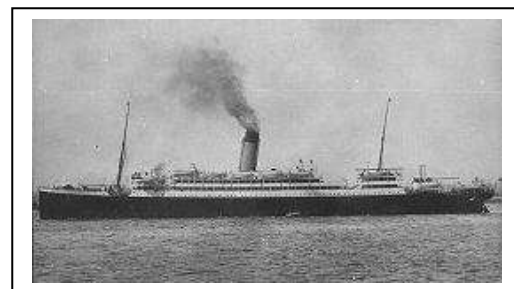


Seam Murphy officially terminated his attachment to *OSIRIS II* on November 19-20 of that year of 1916 to thereupon return to England, although the exact date on which he reported back to *Pembroke I* appears not to have been documented.

Inevitably a number of those days at this time would have been spent on board ship returning from the Mediterranean. But it may have been even while he was with *Osiris II* that he, and a number of other Newfoundland reservists, being considered deserving of a month's furlough at home, were soon to be informed of their upcoming passage back to Newfoundland.

The journey was to be made on board another armed merchant cruiser: *HMS Laurentic*.

The ship was to sail from Birkenhead, a port adjacent to Liverpool, on that January 23 with a reported four-hundred seventy-five* persons on board as well as some forty tons of gold with which to buy munitions in North America.



(Right above: *The photograph of 'Laurentic', likely seen here in peace-time as no guns are visible on her decks, is from the Naval-History.net web-site*)

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**While it is recorded that 'Laurentic' was carrying no passengers or troops, it should be remembered that some of those on board were returning home for leave or for repatriation.*

While passing by the north-west coast of Ireland on the morning of January 25, the ship unexpectedly put into the small town of Buncrana in Lough (*Lough* pronounced as in *Loch Ness*) Swilly to put ashore several sick crew-members. At five o'clock on that same afternoon *Laurentic* was under way again.

She then passed through the protective boom at the entrance to Lough Swilly and gathered speed – it was apparently for her speed that she had been chosen to carry the gold as she could out-run most ships and any U-boat. She was barely three kilometres from the coast when she struck two German mines in quick succession and rapidly began to sink; nor after the second explosion was there any power and thus no distress signal could be sent.

There was little time to lower the life-boats although apparently all on board *Laurentic*, apart from perhaps some engine-room personnel who were already dead, were able to board them. It was to do them little good.

A snow-storm was blowing and most of the men were not clothed to resist it. Any help had to travel the length of the Lough and then through open seas to reach them. Apparently the nearest land could only be reached in the teeth of the gale that was blowing, a wind reckoned to be at minus twelve degrees, and the boats were filling with water.

And those that eventually managed to land found themselves isolated on the rocky, barren, un-inhabited coast of Donegal.

(Right top and right above: *The Memorial to those who perished on that January 25 of 1916 during the sinking of HMS 'Laurentic'; and the churchyard of St. Mura of the Church of Ireland at Upper Fahan, Ireland, wherein stands the aforesaid Memorial and where many of the dead lie to this day – photographs from 2011*)

Little wonder, perhaps, that of the four-hundred seventy-five on board *Laurentic*, three-hundred fifty-four were to die.

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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*)

The son of James Murphy, labourer, and of Sarah Murphy of Conception Harbour in the District of Harbour Main, Newfoundland, he was also brother to James-Leo and to Catherine.

Seaman Lawrence Murphy was recorded as having died in the...*sinking of HMS Laurentic*...on January 25 of 1917 at the age of twenty-two years: *reported* date of birth in Conception Harbour, Newfoundland, October 15, 1895, (this date from only his enlistment papers) which a copy of Vital Statistics suggests as the birth date of his brother James-Leo.

Seaman Murphy 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 Lawrence Murphy was entitled to the British War Medal (left) 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.