

Thus far an image of Seaman Murrin's grave in Lark Harbour is not available.

Seaman William Henry Murrin, Number 2447x, lies in St. James' Anglican Cemetery in the community of Lark Harbour, Bay of Islands, Newfoundland.

William Henry Murrin was to relinquish his occupation, likely that of a fisherman, and to travel from Lark Harbour, to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland in the spring of 1918. On May 22 of that year he reported...*to duty*...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Briton*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that above date he enlisted into the Reserve, committing his services for the...*Duration of the War*\*...and underwent the requisite medical assessment at the same time. It was also likely then that he would have pledged his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V. Now there was to be a period of training apparently abbreviated from the habitual twenty-eight days.

(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 in the uniform of an Admiral of the Fleet is from the Royal Collection Trust web-site, taken circa 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.*

**(Right below: 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)**

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



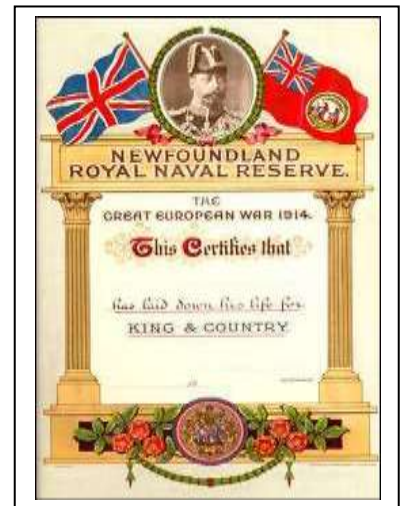
It was only a matter of days after his enlistment that Seaman William Henry Murrin fell ill – in fact, it may have happened beforehand. Whenever it had been, it was eleven days later that he passed away in St. John's from bronchitis and pneumonia – although whether or not he had been hospitalized is not clear.

The son of William Murrin, fisherman, and of Priscilla Murrin (née *Smith*\*) of Lark Harbour (but formerly of Spaniard's Bay), he was also brother to Theresa, John, Snowden, Sarah, Elizabeth and perhaps James.

*\*The couple had been married in the community of Spaniard's Bay on December 24, Christmas Eve, of 1887.*

Seaman Murrin was recorded as having *died of sickness* on June 2 of 1918: date of birth in the Conception Bay community of Spaniard's Bay, October 6, 1897 (from enlistment papers and a copy of Newfoundland Vital Statistics).

Seaman Murrin is not recorded as having been eligible for any medal as he was to serve on neither in a *theatre of war* nor on *overseas service*. His family, however should have received a copy of the scroll shown at right.



*(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: It is nor recorded if or not his family was to receive this memento.)*

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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 21, 2023.

