

O'KEEFE, E.



Leading Seaman Edward O'Keefe (the family name having evolved from simply *Keefe* in or about the year 1894), Number 1266x, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on a bronze beneath the Caribou at the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

Having decided to *answer the call* of the naval authorities for volunteers, Edward O'Keefe relinquished his occupation of seaman working out of St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on October 28 of 1914, he reported...*to duty**...on the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that same October 28 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 underwent a satisfactory medical assessment. Edward O'Keefe 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.*)



(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.

(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)

(Right: 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 in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)



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: 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.

Following a mere three weeks of training* in St. John's, Seaman O'Keefe, one of a draft of one-hundred forty-nine naval reservists, embarked on November 18-19 onto the *Allan Line* ocean-liner *Carthaginian* which was apparently returning on its commercial route from Philadelphia(?) to Glasgow and thereupon took the draft on board. She sailed at nine o'clock in the evening of the 19th, its reservist passengers un-mentioned in the local newspapers.



(Right above: A relatively elderly vessel, 'Carthaginian' had been launched in October of 1884. She apparently remained un-requisitioned as a troop transport during the conflict although this did not prevent her from being sunk by a mine laid by a U-boat off the Irish coast on June 14 of 1917 – happily without any loss of life it may be added. – the un-dated photograph of *Carthaginian* entering St. John's harbour has been donated to the *Maritime History Archive* web-site by Captain Harry Stone.)

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**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'.*

Once having disembarked in the United Kingdom it appears that while some few of the men were posted directly to a ship, the majority was ordered directly to undergo further training at various Royal Navy establishments and thus, likely having journeyed by train, reported to these bases on or about November 28-29.

Seaman O'Keefe's destination was to be HMS *Vivid I**, a Division of the Royal Navy port and facilities at Plymouth-Devonport on the south coast of England and almost at the other end of the country from Glasgow.

**The Royal Navy had a disciplinary system which in certain ways differed from civil – and even Army – law; but for it to be employed, a sailor had to be attached to a ship. While at sea, of course, this posed no problem, but when a sailor was performing duties on land that were not associated directly to a particular ship he still had to be held accountable for any untoward behaviour.*

The Navy's training establishments were for the most part on land: Devonport (although apparently only a shore base and a holding-barracks for seamen awaiting postings during the Great War), Chatham, and Portsmouth for example, were terrestrial facilities for many thousands of naval personnel, some of who were permanently stationed there. Thus the practice became to base an elderly or even obsolete ship in the nearby port to be, nominally, the vessel to which this personnel was to be attached. This appears to have been the procedure for the large number of shore bases organized around the coast of the United Kingdom during the Great War.

HMS 'Vivid', the base to which Seaman O'Keefe had been ordered after his arrival in the United Kingdom from Newfoundland, was not only all the buildings and facilities on shore, but also a small, elderly, nondescript depot ship (originally HMS 'Cukoo', built 1873), to which all the naval personnel was attached and was the name to be emblazoned on the bands of their cap.

These establishments were at times divided into sections: the holding barracks at 'Vivid I' was where the seamen (as opposed to engine-room personnel, for example, who were sent to 'Vivid II') such as Seaman O'Keefe were likely initially to be stationed – as well as potential signallers and telegraphers - while awaiting a posting to one of His Majesty's ships.



(Right above: *The main gateway to the once-Royal Navy establishment at Plymouth-Devonport – photograph from 2011(?)*)

When it was that Seaman O'Keefe was dispatched from *Vivid I* to the awaited posting appears not to have been recorded but it may well have been on or about Christmas Day since the posting was to be at a distance of some two-thousand kilometres from Plymouth-Devonport.

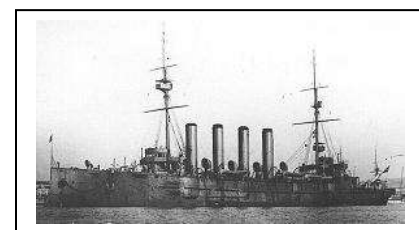
His Service Records document that Seaman O'Keefe was...*taken on strength*...on the cruiser *Amphitrite* in Gibraltar on New Year's Day of 1915.



(Right: *The British Crown Colony of Gibraltar in pre-Great War days: The Spanish mainland is in the background beyond the harbour and Royal Navy dockyard. – from a vintage postcard*)

An elderly vessel launched in 1898, HMS *Amphitrite* was the victim of the technological advances of the time, she was already a reserve ship as early as 1906 – although re-commissioned a year later. She became a ship of the 9th Cruiser Squadron in the first month of the *Great War* and by that autumn was operating in the waters between Plymouth and Gibraltar.

On January 1, 1915, His Majesty's Transport arrived in the harbour at Gibraltar. It may be that Seaman O'Keefe had travelled from England on this ship but there is no confirmation of this.



(Right: *The photograph of HMS 'Amphitrite' is from the naval-history.net web-site.*)

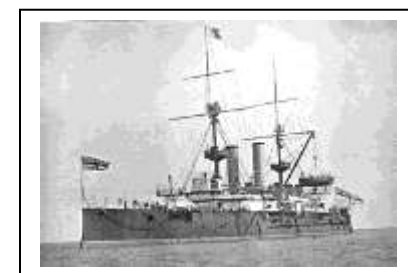
The following months were to be spent on patrol in warmer climes: Gibraltar, the Canary Islands, Madeira, the Cape Verde Islands, the Portuguese coast, the Salvage Islands before heading back to England and Portsmouth in the month of June.

HMS *Amphitrite* was thereupon to be paid off* and on June 22 Seaman O'Keefe was recorded as having once again been on the nominal roll – even if only on paper - of *Vivid I*. On paper or not, he was on *Vivid I*'s strength from the afore-mentioned June 22 until September 9 when he is seen to have been transferred** to one of the Royal Navy's venerable heavyweights.

**She was later to be resurrected as a mine-layer.*

***He was surely already transferred by August of that year (see below).*

HMS *Revenge* was a pre-*Dreadnought* battleship, one of many such vessels in all the major navies of the world made obsolete almost overnight by the advent of the above-mentioned *Dreadnought* leviathans.



Seaman O'Keefe was not to serve on *Revenge* for very long, not least of all because the ship was renamed as *Redoubtable* in that August of 1915. Even so, his tenure on the ship is recorded as having terminated on October 6, *Redoubtable* to be laid up in Portsmouth only days later.

It appears that Seaman O'Keefe had been obliged to travel to Dover to serve on *Revenge/Redoubtable*. The vessel had been stationed there to serve as a Bombarding

Ship, and as such had undoubtedly sailed from time to time within range of the occupied Belgian coast in order to use her twelve-inch guns.

(Preceding page: The photograph of 'Revenge at anchor', taken in or about 1897, is from the Wikipedia web-site.)

And by the time *Redoubtable* sailed into Portsmouth Harbour in that October, Seaman O'Keefe was already back serving at *Vivid I*. But then it would seem that he was attached to a vessel that the author has been unable to identify: *Garfingria*, on which he was apparently to serve for well over six months.

Those two-hundred four days having passed, presumably with nothing untoward having occurred during that time with everyday tasks and duties seemingly being the major feature of every routine day, Seaman O'Keefe was thereupon transferred to another Royal Naval establishment, HMS *Pembroke*, at Chatham on the River Medway, itself a tributary of the better-known River Thames, and 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 base for regular seamen and it was perhaps *Pembroke I* to which Seaman O'Keefe was attached, there to perhaps await a further posting to one of His Majesty's ships.

Or perhaps it was to sail homeward for a period of furlough – normally of a month's duration. It will undoubtedly be noted by the reader that the timing appears to interfere with the dates of his postings to *Pembroke* and subsequently to *President III*; however, these attachments were to holding barracks and not to ships...and there is little doubt that Seaman O'Keefe was to soon spend time at home.

Nevertheless, in the meantime he was surely to be quartered for up to four months at *Pembroke*.

**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 presence of elderly and obsolescent vessels that plied the waters adjacent to the many naval land establishments which were known as stone frigates. The ships were in theory the home ships of the tens, hundreds, even thousands of men who laboured on shore.



Which is why Seaman O'Keefe would have worn an HMS 'Pembroke' hat-band – until he joined 'President III'.

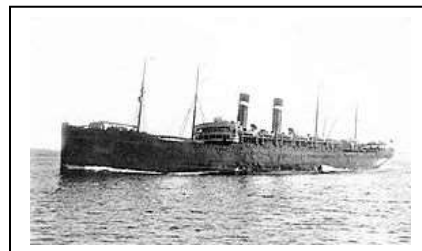
(Preceding page: *Buildings of the large Royal Navy complex which was the HMS 'Pembroke' naval establishment at Chatham for just over one hundred years. Today it has been transformed into a university campus. – photograph from 2010*)

As seen above, while Seaman O'Keefe was to spend weeks and even months *on the books of Pembroke* – and later at *President III* - he had not always been present there. The passenger list of the SS *Southland* of the *White Star-Dominion Line*, sailing from Portland, Maine, via Halifax and which would arrive in Liverpool on December 17 of that 1916, records that *Naval Rating Edward O'Keefe, 1266x*, had disembarked from the vessel on that day as one of a detachment of fifty-two Newfoundland Reservists, some returning through Halifax *to duty* in the United Kingdom after furlough at home, but many others sailing overseas for the first time.

Seaman O'Keefe had thus apparently been one of those fortunate enough to have been deemed deserving of a period of leave at home although the exact dates appear not to have been documented.

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

Once returned to the United Kingdom and as was the practice as seen further above, Seaman O'Keefe and his travelling comrades-in arms, if not posted directly to a ship, were dispersed to the various Royal Navy establishments around the coast of England. Thus he reportedly found himself back at HMS *President III* where he had apparently been on the nominal roll as of November 1 of that 1916.



It may have been noticed that in the opening paragraph of this file, Edward O'Keefe was referred to as Leading Seaman O'Keefe. This rank is confirmed by Royal Navy records but yet no documentation or details of that promotion appear among the records that are available, although there is confirmation. Neither is there any record of his reported capacity as a trained gunner, the apparent reason for his final posting.

Before that last posting afloat there was to be that aforementioned *official* terrestrial attachment to *President III* on or about November 1. The first HMS *President* had been a vessel moored in the Thames at London, a ship which had been chosen prior to the *Great War* to act as a drill ship for the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. As the conflict had evolved, so had the Navy's shore-based establishments and therefore *President* had been divided to serve a growing number of functions.



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(Preceding page: *During the period of Seaman O’Keefe’s posting to HMS ‘President III’, the sloop HMS ‘Buzzard’ had taken on the mantle of HMS ‘President’ although whether or not Seaman Marsh would have set foot on her deck – or even seen her – is not clear. – photograph from Wikipedia)*

President III was the Accounting Division, responsible for the financial aspects of the myriad charges of the establishment, its offices often outside the capital city. But there would appear to have also been some authority for the placement of seamen on ships, since it was while at *President III* that Seaman O’Keefe – there is just a suggestion that it was while at *President III* that he was elevated to be a leading seaman – was assigned duties as a gunner(?) on board a steamer, the SS *Lynorta*.

When exactly it was that Leading Seaman O’Keefe set foot on *Lynorta’s* deck for the first time is not clear although it may have been on or at some time soon after April 7 of 1917. Weighing some three-thousand seven-hundred tons, she had been built in 1902 and at the time of her loss was operating as a cargo ship out of Liverpool*.



**The ship was apparently already somewhat known before 1917 as she had been involved in the transport of supplies to Belgium, particularly in 1915, to the thousands of Belgians displaced by the German occupation of most of the country.*

(Right above: *In April of 1915 the tug ‘Taurus’ helps the hired ‘Lynorta’ navigate Boston Harbour – Boston, USA - on her way to Belgium with supplies for war refugees. - From the Boston Public Library – Leslie Jones Collection web-site.)*

There is little information to be found about Leading Seaman O’Keefe’s service on board *Lynorta* during the spring and summer of 1917. At the end of the first week of August she left the Scottish port of Glasgow with a cargo of coal bound for the port of Livorno on the west coast of Italy. The vessel was sailing well off the north-west coast of Ireland on August 12 when she encountered the German submarine U-94.



There appears to be no record as to whether *Lynorta* was sunk by torpedoes or by gunfire although the fact that there were only two fatalities might suggest that it was by gunfire with the crew having taken to the boats.

(Right above: *The image – with no date or rank provided or in view – of Edward O’Keefe in naval uniform is from the Canadian Virtual War Memorial, Veterans’ Affairs Canada.)*

The son of John O’Keefe, labourer, and of Alice O’Keefe (née *Waddleton**), of 39, Patrick Street at the time of his enlistment, St. John’s, Newfoundland, he was also brother to John-Philip, William-Leo, Mary-Gertrude, John-Joseph, Paul-Augustinian and to Mary-Joseph.

****The couple was married in St. John's on January 17 of 1884.***

(Right: Seaman O'Keefe is commemorated on this monument which stands in Belvedere Cemetery in St. John's. – photograph from 2010)

Leading Seaman Edward O'Keefe...drowned during the sinking of the SS Lynorta...on that August 12, 1917, at the recorded age of twenty-eight (sic) years: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, August 23, 1886 (found only in his Service Record).

Leading Seaman O'Keefe 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 Edward O'Keefe was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal (centre) and 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.