

Seaman Josiah Wesley Peach*, Number 2319x, is buried in Haslar Royal Naval Cemetery, Gosport, in the southern English county of Hampshire.

****Incorrectly inscribed as Joseph on the grave marker seen in the above photograph.***

Having relinquished his occupation, likely that of fisherman, and having then travelled from the Placentia Bay community of Spencer's Cove on Long Island, to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on July 24 of 1917 Josiah Wesley Peach

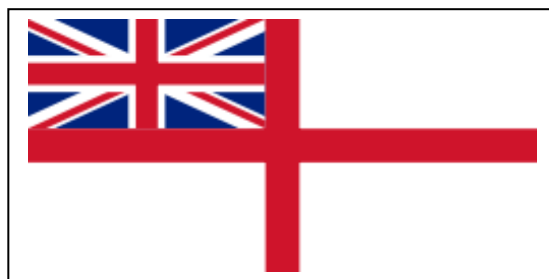
reported...to duty...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Briton*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that same late-July 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 requisite 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.)



****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.

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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.

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

(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)



(Right: 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)



***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'.**

It was to be well over four months following his enlistment that Seaman Peach – by this time having been promoted from the rank of Seaman Recruit was to leave St. John's as *one of a small draft of Naval Reservists on December 2 by express train to Port aux Basques. The detachment was leaving on overseas service.*

Having arrived in Port aux Basques on the morrow, December 3, Seaman Peach crossed the Cabot Strait on board the SS *Kyle* on that night of December 3-4 to arrive in North Sydney at six o'clock the next morning. After immigration formalities had concluded, he and his comrades-in-arms were to take a train for the journey to Halifax, from there ostensibly to board a ship for trans-Atlantic passage.

Neither the name of the vessel on which Seaman Peach was now to travel, nor the date of his sailing appears to have been recorded among his papers. And perhaps for good reason: on December 6 of that 1917 the port and city-centre of Halifax were destroyed in a monumental explosion*.

**On December 6 two ships, the Norwegian 'Imo' and the French 'Mont Blanc' had collided, as a result of which the 'Mont Blanc' had caught fire. She was laden with explosives and the subsequent explosion - reportedly the largest man-made explosion in history up until that time – had devastated both the port and the city itself. More than seventeen-hundred had been killed and nine-thousand hurt.*

The down-town and the waterside areas of the city were devastated and to add to the misery of the now-homeless, a major winter storm was unleashed upon them on the following day.

(Right above: A view of an obliterated Halifax with its harbour in the distance, the photograph taken two days after the incident. – from 'Wikipedia')



(Right above: The Royal Canadian Navy Headquarters Ship HMCS 'Niobe' had sent one of its boats to the aid of 'Mont Blanc' before the ship exploded; when she did, all of the boat's crew were killed, as were some of those on board 'Niobe' itself – with several more hurt. The ship was damaged in the blast but was able to continue her functions in a diminished manner. There were several Newfoundland Reservists serving on her at the time, one of whom, a Seaman Pieroway in the Royal Canadian Navy, died in the catastrophe. – The photograph of a damage HMCS *Niobe* is from the *Canadian War Museum* web-site.)

If his ship had sailed prior to the explosion, of course, Seaman Peach would have disembarked in the United Kingdom some eight days later. But if such had not been the case, he would almost certainly have been re-routed to leave from St. John, New Brunswick, as shipping – and communication to and from Halifax - was disrupted entirely for the following five days.

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When Seaman Peach was eventually to reach England is not clear, but when he did he was dispatched immediately to a Royal Navy shore-based establishment, there likely to be ordered to a holding barracks for seamen to await a posting to one of His Majesty's ships. The establishment in question was HMS *Victory I* at Portsmouth, a large naval port-city in the southern 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)

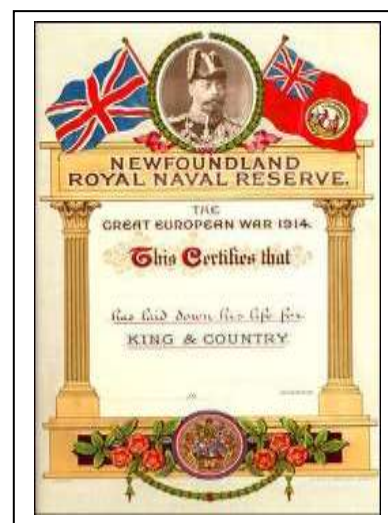
***Naval discipline differed in some ways from civil and even Army law, and those in naval uniform, even though based on land and perhaps never to go to sea, had to be on the books of a real ship for that discipline to be applied. Thus a normally small, obsolescent and obscure vessel – 'Victory' was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

(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)

Although again no dates appear to be available, it could not have been long after Seaman Peach's arrival in the United Kingdom and his subsequent transfer to *Victory I* that he would have been admitted into hospital, the *Royal Hospital Haslar*, on the nearby Gosport Peninsula.

The son of Emmanuel Peach, former fisherman deceased on March 9, 1912 of *unknown* causes, and of Elizabeth Ann Peach (née *Crann*), he was also brother to Henry and Chesley (twin), and to Emmanuel-James.

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Seaman Peach was reported as having...*died of sickness*...on February 13 of 1918 in the above-cited hospital in England of broncho-pneumonia at the *reported* age of twenty-two years: date of birth in Spencer's Cove, Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, August 24, 1895 (from his enlistment papers) but likely later, if his brother's recorded birth date of November 12, 1895, is correct.

Seaman Peach 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 Josiah Wesley Peach was entitled to the British War Medal, seen on the preceding page, for his *overseas service*.

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.