



Seaman Jacob Pearcey, Number 2065x, lies interred in Plymouth Old Cemetery, Pennycomequick, in the English County of Devon, and shares his last resting-place with Steward Albert Foster and Able Seaman Alfred W. Richards: grave reference, Church S.3.17..

Having answered the call to volunteer from the naval authorities, Jacob Pearcey thereupon relinquished his occupation as a fisherman working out of the Trinity Bay community of New Perlican and travelled to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on April 11 of 1916, he reported...to duty...*on the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Briton* (ex-*Calypso*), moored in the harbour (see below).



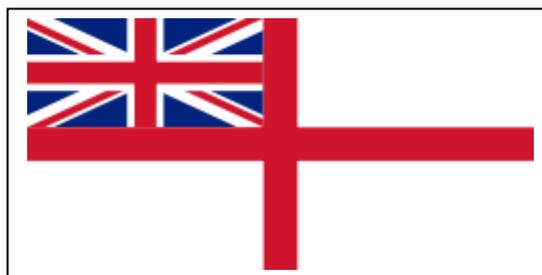
On that same April 11 he enlisted into the Reserve, was signed on to serve for the...*duration of the conflict** and then underwent the required medical assessment on the morrow, April 12. Jacob Pearcey also likely attested at this time, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V.

(Right above: *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' (later 'Briton') 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.*

(continued)

***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.. – 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.



(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 of her by the Royal Navy in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)*



(Right: *The 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)*

Seaman Pearcey's scant personal file documents him leaving for service overseas on or about April 23-24, 1916, twelve days following the formalities of enlistment and they also have him promoted from the rank of *Seaman Recruit* on an unrecorded date during this same period.

The records show that Seaman Pearcey was struck off the books of HMS *Briton* by the above-mentioned April 23 of that 1916 and transferred to the nominal roll of *Vivid I* (see below) on the following day, April 24. Thus a certain number of the days attached to *Vivid I* were not spent at all at *Vivid* but on a ship crossing the Atlantic from Newfoundland to the United Kingdom.



That ship was the SS *Pretorian*, an *Allan Line* ship – the Company, if not the vessel itself, well-known in St. John's – which since 1904 had been running the commercial route between Glasgow and the Canadian ports of Québec and Montréal, and had perhaps deviated from it to embark the naval reservist draft on that occasion. The vessel sailed from St. John's en route to the United Kingdom on or about that aforesaid April 23-24, 1916.

(Right above: *This un-dated photograph of the 'Allan Line' ship SS 'Pretorian' in the 'Prince's Dock' in the Scottish City of Glasgow is from the web-site 'Tangled Roots and Trees' in which it is shown by courtesy of the Graham Lappin Collection.*)

If the experience of previous reservists was then followed, once the draft with which Seaman Pearcey was to travel had landed in the United Kingdom – was it in Glasgow? - several of the men would have been posted directly to a ship. Others would have been ordered to undergo further training – or simply to wait - at various Royal Navy establishments mostly around the coast of southern England and thus, likely having journeyed by train, they likely reported to these bases on or about May 2 or 3.

As seen above, Seaman Pearcey's destination was to be *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 Pearcey 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 Pearcey 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: A main gateway to the once-Royal Navy establishment at Plymouth-Devonport – photograph from 2011(?))

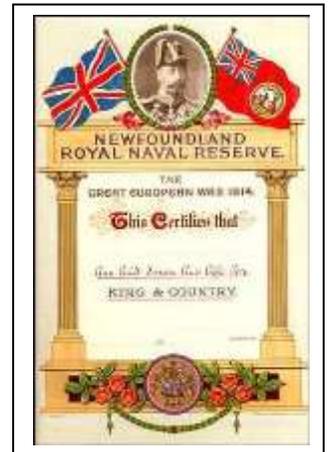
When it was that Seaman Pearcey was admitted into the Royal Navy Sick Quarters at Devonport is not documented among his few papers, although these Quarters were likely the Royal Naval Hospital, Stonehouse, at Plymouth and the time would have been the six-week period prior to June 14 of 1916.



(Right above: A further view of some of the imposing facilities have comprised the Royal Navy establishment at Plymouth-Devonport for over three-hundred years. – photograph from 2010)

The son of Robert Pearcey (also found as *Piercey*), fisherman, and of Mary Jane Pearcey (née *Smith**) of the Trinity Bay community of New Perlican, he was also older brother to James, Arthur and to Harry.

*The couple had married in the Parish of Heart's Content on December 22 of 1897.



Seaman Pearcey was reported as having died in Royal Navy Sick Quarters at Devonport of illness...*pneumonia*...on June 14 of 1916 at the age of eighteen years: date of birth at New Perlican, Newfoundland, January 23 of 1898 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register) but January 9 of the same year (from his enlistment papers).

Seaman Pearcey 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 Jacob Pearcey was entitled to the British War Medal 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.