



Seaman Archibald John Pitcher, Number 1989x, lies interred in Truro Public Cemetery in the English County of Cornwall: Grave reference A. T. 40..

(continued)

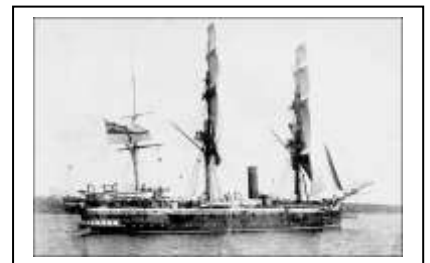
Answering the call for volunteers by the naval authorities for the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland), Archibald John Pitcher relinquished his likely occupation of fisherman and travelled from his home in Scilly Cove (today *Winterton*) in the District of Trinity Bay (South) to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, there on December 22 of the year 1915 to report to the Reserve training ship HMS *Calypso* moored in the harbour.

On that December 22 he enlisted for the first time into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for...*Duration of the War*...and successfully underwent the mandatory medical assessment on the morrow. Archibald John Pitcher 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)

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)*

Having been promoted from the rank of *Seaman Recruit* on an unrecorded date, Seaman Pitcher was to serve on *HMS Calypso* until January 30 of that year of 1916 at which time the vessel was re-commissioned as *HMS Briton*. He was then to remain on *Briton* awaiting a call to overseas service for a further seventy-two days.

The records show that he was struck off the books of *HMS Briton* on April 23 of that year and transferred to the nominal roll of M

HMS Vivid I (see below) on the following day, April 24. Thus a certain number of the days attached to *Vivid I* were in fact not spent 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 April 23, 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 Pitcher travelled 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 Pitcher'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.

**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 Pitcher 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 officially attached and which was the name to be emblazoned on the bands of the seaman's 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 Pitcher – as well as those who were to be trained in signalling and telegraphy - were initially to be stationed 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(?))

*After a period of fifty three days spent on land and attached to Vivid I – this including the aforementioned time spent traversing the Atlantic Ocean -, Seaman Pitcher was attached on June 16-17, to the ship *Australia**, there to serve until August 2 of that same 1916, a posting which was to last only forty-six days*

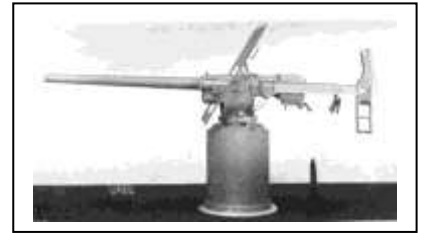
The problem thereupon arises for the historian that there were two ships of that name serving in the Royal Navy during the Great War: one was an elderly trawler hired for the duration of the conflict and which was to serve as a boom-defence vessel; the other was a massive battle-cruiser – in fact a ship of the Royal Australian Navy – which in 1916 was a war-ship of the British Grand Fleet and based in Rosyth, Scotland.



(Right above: Royal Navy armed trawlers in the port of Dover during the Great War – from the Imperial War Museum web-site...iwm.org.uk..)

*His Majesty's Trawler *Australia* had been built in 1882 and was to work out of the east-coast fishing-port of Hull; she weighed just two-hundred thirty-eight tons and would not go into war-time service until August of 1916.*

However, *if* indeed this was to be his ship. Seaman Pitcher *may* have joined her *before* the initiation of that service while she was being re-fitted and armed with a single six-pounder gun for anti-aircraft purposes.



(Right: A Quick-Firing Hotchkiss six-pounder gun such as would had been mounted on the fore-deck of the trawler *White Ear* – from Wikipedia)

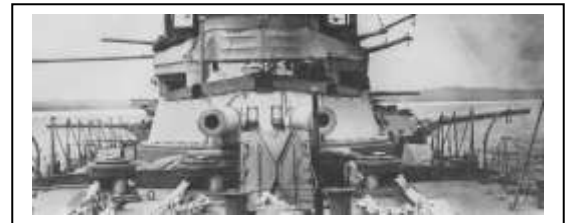
On the other hand the *other* ship, HMAS *Australia* the *Indefatigable-Class* battle-cruiser, was in an altogether-different league. Launched in late 1911 she weighed a hefty eighteen-thousand tons and could move that weight at a speed of some forty-five kilometres per hour. She had no six-pounder gun, it is true, but in its place there were eight twelve-inch and sixteen four-inch guns supplemented by three torpedo-tubes.



(Right: HMAS 'Australia' entering Sydney Harbour for the first time on October 4 of 1913 – from a Royal Australian Navy web-site)

(Right below: Peering down the business end of two of Australia's twelve-inch guns – from the same Royal Australian Navy web-site.)

At the time when Seaman Pitcher *may* have joined her complement, his battle-cruiser, having missed action in the *Battle of Jutland* – May 31 to June 1, 1916 - was undergoing repairs to damage incurred on April 22 due to a collision on that date with a sister-ship, *New Zealand*, some of those repairs to be undertaken in the dockyard at Devonport.

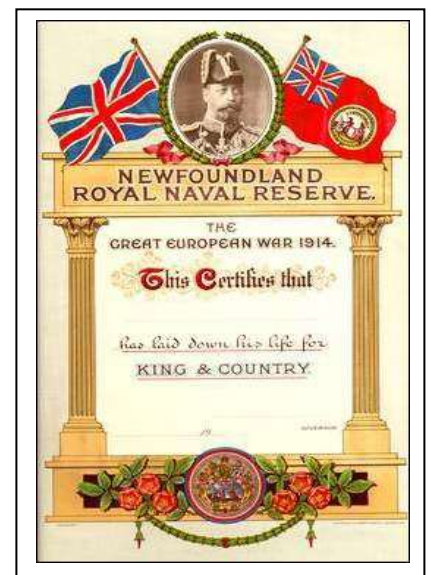


The ship had left the dockyard on June 9, eight days after the conclusion of the Battle of Jutland and then returned to the base at Rosyth, Scotland.

HMAS *Australia* had thereupon resumed North Sea patrols as a unit of the British Grand Fleet - until 12 November 1917, when another collision, this time with HMS *Repulse*, caused her to be docked for a further three weeks.

By this date, of course, Seaman Pitcher was no longer to be serving on any ship at all.

On August 3, 1916, he was again attached to *Vivid I*, although perhaps only nominally as he may well have been ill by this time. Whatever the case, he was soon to be hospitalized in Truro, in the county of Cornwall, perhaps at the Royal Naval Auxiliary Hospital.



The son of Eli Pitcher, fisherman, and of Elizabeth Pitcher (née *Whiteway**) of Scilly Cove (re-named *Winterton* in 1912) he was also brother to Mary-Anne, Daniel, Absolom, Abram, Lucy and to Charles*.

**The couple was married in the community of Scilly Cove on December 7 of 1889.*

(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)

Seaman Archibald John Pitcher was recorded as having died in hospital in Truro – Cornwall, *not* Nova Scotia as one source cites – of tubercular meningitis on September 15 of 1916 – not September 15 as a further source cites: date of birth in Scilly Cove, Newfoundland, January 28, 1895 (from a Royal Navy source but needs confirmation).



Seaman Pitcher 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.

(Right above: The sacrifice of Seaman Archibald John Pitcher is honoured on the War Memorial which stands in the Trinity Bay community of Winterton. – photograph from 2011(?))

Seaman Archibald John Pitcher was entitled to the British War Medal* for his overseas service (from the *UK, Naval Medal and Award Rolls*).



**His brother Charles had also been a naval réservist – Number 2038x – enlisting on September 22 of 1915 and having gone overseas in the company of his brother Archibald on the SS ‘Pretorian’ in April of the following year.*

Having arrived in the United Kingdom, Seaman Charles Pitcher was to be posted with his brother Archibald to the holding-barracks at ‘Vivid I’. However, this was to be where the two brothers parted ways: Archibald posted to ‘Australia’ (see above) in June whereas it was not to be until two months later that Charles was ordered attached to HMS ‘Snaefell’ on August 20 of that 1916.

Owned by the ‘Isle of Man Steam Packet Company’, the above-named small passenger, mail and cargo ship had been requisitioned by the Admiralty in 1914 after the out-break of war and was converted for use as an armed boarding steamer – those arms being two twelve-pounder quick-firing naval guns and a smaller two-pounder weapon. The ship was commissioned for her war-time service on November 24 of 1914.

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These vessels often worked in tandem with Royal Navy Cruiser Squadrons to inspect – and at times to board and seize – vessels at sea which might be carrying cargoes valuable to the enemy’s war effort.

HMS ‘Snaefell’ was to undertake most of her war-time duties in the eastern Mediterranean Sea – tasks also to include patrolling, mine-sweeping and carrying troops as well as prisoners-of-war, - and it was there while on her way from the British base at Alexandria to the island of Malta – with Seaman Charles Pitcher serving on board – that she was torpedoed and sunk by U-boat 105 on June 5 of 1918 with the loss of eight members of her complement – but not Seaman Pitcher.



(Right above: The image of a likely-peacetime ‘Snaefell’ is from the Wikipedia web-site.)

Following his Mediterranean adventures, Seaman Charles Pitcher was re-assigned to HMS ‘Briton’ (ex-‘Calypso’) although exactly when he was to return to the shores of Newfoundland appears not to have been recorded. He served until May 4 of 1919.

Seaman Charles Pitcher was entitled to the British War Medal and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) for his overseas service and service in a theatre of war.

He survived the conflict and returned to marry Ida Holley of Crabbes in May of 1919 in Winterton (formerly Scilly Cove).



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.