

POWER J. J.



Seaman John Joseph Power, Number 2275x, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on a bronze beneath the Caribou at the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

Having relinquished his occupation in St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on November 8 of 1916 John Joseph Power, having been rejected as *unfit* by the Newfoundland Regiment, reported...*to duty*...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Briton*, moored in the harbour (see below).



On that same November 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 required medical assessment. 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.*)



(continued)

*****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.

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.

(Preceding page: *HMS 'Calypso' in full sail. She was to be re-commissioned HMS 'Briton' in early 1916 when a new 'Calypso', a modern cruiser, was about to be launched by the Royal Navy. – This photograph, taken of the 'Newfoundland Calypso' by the Royal Navy in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)*



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

(Right below: *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*)

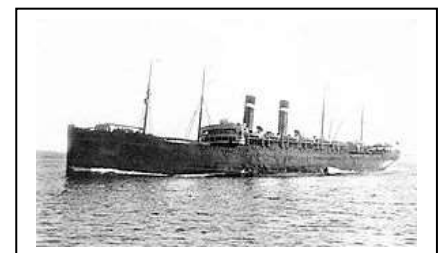
Twenty-eight days later, on December 6 of that same year, Seaman Power – as one of a draft of fifty naval reservists and a single Chief Petty Officer - departed Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, for the United Kingdom. The transport vessel was the SS *Southland* en route from Portland, Maine to Liverpool – the vessel's originally called *Vaderland*, a Dutch or Belgian ship whose name had been deemed too Germanic-sounding and which later, in June of 1917, was to be torpedoed and lost while en route from Liverpool to Philadelphia.



Of course, Seaman Power's draft had left St. John's for Halifax some days before the SS *Southland* sailed for Liverpool. But ascertaining how the reservists were to journey to there has proved to be more than difficult. There were two reasonable possibilities for a contingent of some fifty persons: by train to Port aux Basques, a ferry-ride across the Cabot Strait, and then a train journey once again on to Halifax; or there was the direct passage by ship from St. John's to Halifax – both means of transport necessitating up to three days' travel.

Whichever was to be the case, a revised schedule saw *Southland* leave Halifax three days late, on December 6, and arrive in Liverpool eleven days afterwards, on December 17.

Once having set foot in the United Kingdom, the Naval personnel would have been either posted directly to a ship, ordered to undergo further training or to await a posting, at one of various Royal Navy establishments – these for the most part around the coast of England. In the case of Seaman Power, the destination was to be HMS *Victory I*, on the south coast of England at Portsmouth.



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

**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 it was only a shore-base during the Great War), Chatham, and Portsmouth for example, were land bases 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.

Thus, HMS 'Victory', the base to which Seaman Power had been ordered after his arrival in the United Kingdom from Newfoundland, was not only all the buildings and facilities on shore, but also HMS 'Victory' the warship, the vessel from which Admiral Nelson had directed the Battle of Trafalgar – although the ship's illustrious history is not limited to that one single incident.

It was also the name which all the sailors attached to HMS 'Victory' were to have emblazoned on their cap-bands.

Furthermore, these establishments were at times divided into sections: 'Victory I' was where the seamen (as opposed to the engine-room personnel, for example, in 'Victory II') such as Seaman Power were to be stationed while awaiting a posting to one of His Majesty's ships.

(Right: HMS 'Victory' is seen here in dry dock in the southern English naval port-city of Portsmouth where she has been since the late 1920s – photograph from Wikipedia)



Seaman Power was to serve at *Victory I* from the time of his arrival in the United Kingdom until March 2 of 1915. At this point, on March 3, he was transferred to the above-mentioned *Victory II* for a short term of only twenty-six days; however, it would seem not to have been at *Victory II*, nor even on land, that he was now to serve for at least a part of this period.

On some undocumented date he was attached to the apparently innocuous motor lugger HMS *Bayard*; she was a Q-ship, the evolution of which is an example of how wars have a tendency to escalate in their intensity.

At the outset of the *Great War*, U-boats which attacked merchant and passenger vessels often did so on the surface, thus allowing the passengers and crew to take to the boats before sinking the ship by gunfire*. The British then introduced *Q-ships* – which *officially*

did not exist, nor, logically, did any log-books...so no records - usually small commercial vessels which allowed the German submarines to approach on the surface before uncovering concealed guns to surprise and fire upon the nearby U-boat.

**An example of this protocol, and of Newfoundland interest, was the sinking of the Bowring Brothers ship SS 'Stephano' in October of 1916 off the American coast. There were no casualties.*

One of the consequences of the advent of the Q-ships, perhaps not surprisingly, was that the Germans, having lost a number of submarines in this manner, were to introduce a policy of warfare which allowed its U-boats to attack without surfacing or giving any warning, thus causing the deaths of a greater number of civilians and merchant seamen.



(Right above: The Q-Ship HMS 'Tamerisk', five times the size of Bayard and more heavily armed, served under a number of names to camouflage her identity. – photograph from Wikipedia web-site)

Bayard, of just two-hundred twenty tons, had been built in 1908 for commercial use. She came into service as a Q-ship on January 25, 1917, fitted for the purpose with at least one thirteen-pounder naval gun as well as a single three-pounder weapon. The vessel also had two alternative names, *Ledger* and *Syren*, to use when necessary to hide her identity.



(Right above: A photographic example of the aforesaid Hotchkiss 3 pounder quick-firing gun as possibly mounted on 'Bayard' – from Wikipedia)

There appear to be no records of Bayard's activities during the time of Seaman Power's presence on board – nor of any other period, in fact. All that is to be found is that she was operating in the North Sea at the time of her collision, March 29, with another vessel – even whether Allied or German is not clear...

...except to add that the ship was lost as were all fifteen crew-members on board.

The son of Edward Power, labourer, and of Alice Power of 66A, Pleasant Street in the city of S. John's, he was brother to James, William, Mary, Annie and to Thomas*.

**This all from the 1921 Census which records the family living on Pleasant Street at the time. It has, however, been difficult to distinguish among what may have been as many as three couples of Edward and Alice Power living in or about St. John's during this period.*



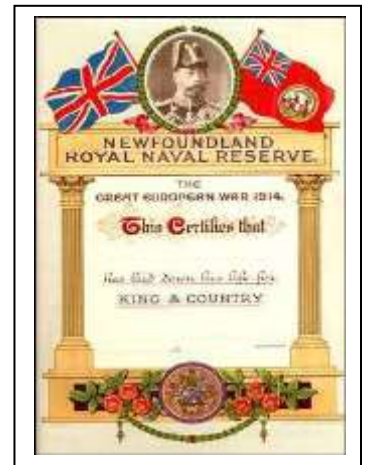
(Right above: The sacrifice of Seaman Power is commemorated on this family headstone in Section I of Mount Carmel Cemetery, St. John's, a stone which is also dedicated to the memory of Anastatia O'Keefe, grandmother of Seaman Power. – photograph from 2015)

Seaman John Joseph Power was recorded as having died in the sinking of HMS *Bayard* on March 29 of 1917 – the Newfoundland Death Register cites, for no apparent reason, March 31 - at the youthful age of eighteen years: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, August 19 of 1898 (from only Seaman Power's enlistment papers).

(Right: 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 Power 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 John Joseph Power was entitled to the British War Medal and to 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.