



Seaman Loyal Randell (also found as *Randall*) Number 989x is buried in Elliott's Cove Cemetery on Random Island, Trinity Bay, and also is commemorated in Mount Pleasant Cemetery in St. John's (see further below).

Having decided to volunteer for the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland), Loyal Randell had initially presented himself for enlistment on March 20 of 1912, whereupon he was to undergo twenty-eight days of training, until April 17 of that same year.

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As with the majority of pre-War volunteers, he had joined-up for five years and would have undergone the required annual training of at least twenty-eight days on four further occasions during the remainder of that period. However it was not to be, and the months of January and February of 1914 saw his second and final term of training on *Calypso* before events were to intervene and he was called to fulfil his obligations and report for war-time service.

Summoned from home *to service* at the onset of hostilities, Loyal Randell travelled from his family residence in Elliott's Cove to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on August 19 of 1914 – two weeks and a day after the British *Declaration of War* – he was once again to report...*to duty*...to the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that above-mentioned August day, Loyal Randell was signed on for wartime service* and it was likely to have been at this time – if he had not already done so - that he also attested, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor.



(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 in the uniform of an Admiral of the Fleet is from the Royal Collection Trust web-site, taken in or about 1935.*)

**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.*)



(Right above: *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*)

**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: 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.



A branch of the senior service from Britain's oldest colony. Naval reservists before leaving Newfoundland to serve in the Empire's cause.

*(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 on the point of being launched by the Royal Navy. – The photograph by the Royal Navy in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum.)*



At some time during the period of three weeks plus a day following his arrival there was confirmation of Loyal Randell's rank as seaman. As seen above, he had already undergone the mandatory training on three occasions during previous years so what his duties were to be during those twenty-two days is not certain.

But on September 5 he was to be seconded to the fledgling Royal Canadian Navy and to board the cruiser HMCS *Niobe* which at the time was in St. John's Harbour awaiting a detachment of the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve.



(Right above: *'Niobe', seen here in St. John's Harbour, was ceded by Great Britain to Canada on September 6, 1910, to be the country's main east coast naval vessel. Superfluous to Royal Navy needs, she was an elderly... '1st Class Armoured Diadem Cruiser'...of eleven-thousand tons, armed with numerous guns, thirty-two altogether, and two torpedo-tubes.*

However, by October of 1915 *'Niobe'* was worn out, to be disarmed and relegated to the role of harbour-service and headquarters ship in the harbour at Halifax - see below). – from the collection of William Herbert Rose and Marmaduke Rose (by Courtesy of Bud (Donald Rose) and found in the *For Posterity's sake – an RCN Historical Project web-site*)



(Right above: *A naval tender carry Newfoundland Reservists from HMS 'Calypso' to HMCS 'Niobe'*. – The photograph by The Evening Telegram dated September 30, 1914, is from the Provincial Archives.)*

**Some sources refer to the ship – in 1914 - as HMS 'Niobe', but on September 6, 1910, she had already been re-commissioned as HMCS 'Niobe' for almost four years.*

On the date on which the detachment of just over one-hundred Newfoundland Reservists* was to join the ship's complement, September 5**, HMCS *Niobe* was to officially commence her war-time service.

**They were apparently needed as, when Niobe was being re-fitted and readied for war, many of her crew had been ordered to Canada's west coast and were unavailable when the ship herself had been prepared to sail after her repairs.*

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*****Some Reservists are recorded on their service records as having joined HMCS 'Niobe' on October 15, 1914, but this is highly unlikely as 'Niobe' had visual contact with two Royal Navy ships off New York as late as a quarter past six on the evening of October 13 and mid-day of October 16. Moreover, the discharge register of HMS 'Calypso' documents that September 5 was indeed the date on which some of these men joined 'Niobe' – the records of the others appear to be absent from the register.***

The one hundred names of those Naval Reservists, seconded to 'Niobe' are found in the October 15 edition of at least two local newspapers of the time, but that is all: nowhere is there any further information to be found pertaining to these men.

Various other sources cite the vessel leaving Halifax on September 1, 1914, for St. John's, Newfoundland, to embark (Royal) Naval Reservists from there. At fifteen minutes past eight on that September 9, HMCS 'Niobe' sailed back into Halifax Harbour.

HMCS Niobe's first duty after having absorbed the Newfoundland Reservists into her crew was on September 10 to 14 to escort the Royal Canadian Regiment during its passage from Halifax to Hamilton, capital city of Bermuda, where it was to become the island's garrison. This mission accomplished, the ship sailed northwards to patrol the waters of the Cabot Strait and the Straits of Belle Isle, a task she shared with a Royal Navy cruiser, HMS Lancaster.

Following this episode of but a few weeks, by mid-October of 1914 she was working with the Royal Navy's 4th Cruiser Squadron, also known as Force 'H', which was responsible for the inspection of shipping off the east coast of the United States and as far south as the West Indies.

The United States was a neutral country at the time – she did not join the conflict until April of 1917 – and thus this patrolling and policing of the western Atlantic was the burden of the Royal Navy during the first years of the *Great War*, as was the blockading of German shipping in American harbours. The job involved intercepting merchant ships of all flags, the inspection of cargoes and at times the boarding and the escorting thereof under armed guard of suspect shipping to an Allied – or Associated – port.

This often also involved a great deal of boredom with the exception, perhaps, of the few days – every three weeks or so – when the patrol ships put into Halifax or, less often, Bermuda for re-fuelling and the replenishment of other supplies.

HMCS Niobe was already an elderly ship and the continuous effort of those several months resulted in an elderly *worn-out* ship. Thus when she returned to Halifax in July of 1915, it was decided that she should remain there to become a depot ship and headquarters for the other, smaller, ships of the Royal Canadian Navy on Canada's east coast. She was to remain in Halifax for the remainder of the conflict.

The Newfoundlanders of the Royal Naval Reserve were then to return to St. John's to serve on HMS *Calypso*, some for only a short period of duty, before being dispatched overseas to the United Kingdom and thence to ships of the Royal Navy.

Seaman Randell's Service Record shows that he was put back on the nominal roll of HMS *Calypso* on September 1 of 1915 – although this may have been partially only on paper. Some three weeks later he was on his way once more.

He was a seaman of the draft of one-hundred forty-four Royal Navy Reserve personnel which was to travel across the island of Newfoundland to Port-aux-Basques likely overnight on September 23-24, 1915. The detachment then embarked on the Reid Newfoundland vessel, the SS *Kyle*, for passage to North Sydney where the ship docked on the morrow, September 25, at ten minutes past five in the morning.

(Right: *The SS Kyle, in important element of Newfoundland's history, is seen here beached at the western extreme of the harbour in Harbour Grace. –photograph from 2012*)



From there the Reservists were to travel by the *Inter-Continental Railway* to Québec City where they would be taken on board the SS *Sicilian* arriving from Montreal on her commercial route across the Atlantic to Liverpool.

(Right: *The image of the SS Sicilian at anchor(?) just off-shore is from the WikiTree web-site.*)



It was likely towards the end of the first week of October, 1915, and having disembarked in the afore-mentioned English port-city, that the Naval Reservists would thereupon have been either dispatched directly to a vessel or ordered to undergo further training – or otherwise to simply await a posting to one of His Majesty's ships - at one of various Royal Navy establishments, these for the most part operating around the coast of England.

In the case of Seaman Randell, not having immediately been attached to a vessel, *Pembroke I* (see below) was the establishment to which he was directed and where he was to remain until likely the end of the second week of December of that year – although exactly what his occupations, apart from waiting, were to be during this period of wearing a cap-band emblazoned *HMS Pembroke* has not been made clear.

**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 tens, hundreds, even thousands who laboured on shore.

(Right: A part 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)



There was however, to be at least *one* event of importance to Seaman Randell to occur during this period: a promotion to the rank of leading seaman on December 7, five days before his transfer to HMS *President III*.

There may have been a second event at this time: his return home to Newfoundland for a month of furlough. The entry...*Demobilized*...accompanied by...*Remobilized*...has been written to the right of the record of his service at *President III*; this suggests that a furlough to Newfoundland occurred during this period, although close scrutiny of a number of sources has not unveiled any evidence to support this.

On the other hand, Leading Seaman Randell's records implies that he was not in service between October 30, 1917, and the final day of that year, December 31 – again suggesting a period of leave. Of course, to perhaps complicate matters, there was the *Halifax Explosion* which put the port completely out of commission for several days and rendered it only partially operable for a more considerable amount of time.

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



The down-town and 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')



HMCS *Niobe*, the ship on which Seaman Randell had served earlier during the War had been stationed in Halifax, as seen further above, ever since the summer of 1915, and was in fact located not far from the scene of the explosion. Several Newfoundland Reservists were on board at the time, but there were no fatalities among them.

(Right above: '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. 'Niobe' was damaged in the blast but was able to continue her functions in a diminished manner. – The photograph of a damaged Niobe is from the Canadian War Museum web-site.)

However, there seems to be no information *a propos* Leading Seaman Randell at this time and he was back at HMS *President III* in England on December 31, 1917, to which posting he would remain attached for six weeks. What his duties were to be during this period is not clear, although he does not appear to have set foot on the deck of any ship other than *President III* (see immediately below).

The above-mentioned Royal Navy establishment, *President III*, had initially been located in London where the original – floating – *President* had been opened in 1862 to serve as a drill-ship for recruits of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. *President III*, however, was not a vessel but one of several Divisions to emerge as the *Great War* progressed and was to deal primarily with ships’ finances and accountancy, its offices at times located outside the capital city.



(Right above: *During the period of Seaman Randell’s posting to HMS ‘President III’, the sloop HMS ‘Buzzard’ moored on the River Thames had taken on the mantle of HMS ‘President’ although whether or not Seaman Randell would have set foot on her deck – or even seen her – is not clear. – photograph from Wikipedia)*

It appears to have been on or about February 11-12 of 1918 that Leading Seaman Randell was to traverse the Atlantic one last time. But it is not altogether clear what he was to do when he reported for further duty. His Service Record records him being re-attached to HMS *Briton* until April 19 of the same year, while the *Canadian Virtual War Memorial* documents his final posting to have been in Halifax, once more to serve on HMCS *Niobe* – possibly only until the aforesaid April 19 when he would have been released to Newfoundland.



In either case he was apparently...*invalided for further service...*on that above date which might well suggest that by that time Leading Seaman Randell was already exhibiting symptoms of the malady to which he would eventually succumb. He was discharged definitively from the Navy on May 10.

(Right above: *The sacrifice of Leading Seaman Randell is honoured on the War Memorial which stands in Elliott’s Cove Cemetery on Random Island. – photograph from 2011?)*

The son of John Randell, fisherman, and of Elizabeth Randell of Port Rexton (formerly the two communities of *Ship Cove* and *Robin Hood*), Trinity Bay, at the time of their son’s enlistment, but later of Elliott’s Cove, Random Island, he was also husband to Blanche Maud Walters whom he had wed on January 28, 1919, after his return from naval service – she would later marry *Austin*.



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(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*)

(Right below: *Seaman (sic) Randell is also honoured on the Screen Wall which stands in the Mount Pleasant Cemetery Military Plot in St. John's. – photograph from 2011*)

Leading Seaman Loyal Randell is documented as having died of *pulmonary tuberculosis* at home in Elliott's Cove on October 17, 1920, at the reported age of twenty-seven years*: the date of his birth in English Harbour West, Trinity Bay, Newfoundland, has thus far proved to be elusive.*

**Some sources cite Leading Seaman Randell as having died during the War; others say otherwise. They are all correct: he did not die during the period of hostilities; but the British and Commonwealth (Empire) war dead such as Seaman Randell were considered to be those who died of causes related to the Great War from the moment that War was declared until mid-night of August 31, 1921.*



(Right: *On December 23 of 1918, Leading Seaman Loyal Randell received the Silver War Badge which was awarded... 'To service personnel honourably discharged due to wounds of sickness'. It was to be worn on civilian clothes only. – The image is from the empiremedals.com web-site.)*



Leading Seaman Randell served only in the Royal Navy and was not in the service of Canada – only seconded to 'Niobe' by the Royal Navy – as is cited in some sources notably the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Leading Seaman Loyal Randell was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal (centre), 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 20, 2023.