

**Seaman John Reader, Number 1663x, is interred in Penzance Memorial United Cemetery in the English county of Cornwall: Grave reference, 10.R.9..**

**(continued)**

Having decided to *answer the call* of the naval authorities for volunteers, John Reader relinquished his current occupation in the Newfoundland community of Bonavista and travelled from there to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on February 16 (or 17) of 1915, he reported...*to duty*\*...on board the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below) and was...*taken on strength*.



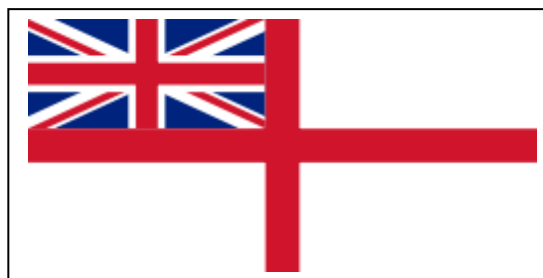
On that mid-February day he enlisted for the first time into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for a single year's\* war-time service and likely underwent the required medical assessment on or about the same time. He also likely attested at this moment, pledging his allegiance to 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 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)***

***(Right: 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)***



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



***(continued)***

***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.***

**Some thirty days after having first reported in St. John’s and by then having been elevated from the rank of *Seaman Recruit*, *Seaman Reader*, one of a draft of seventy naval reservists, departed Newfoundland on March 20 on the Bowring Brothers’ vessel, *Stephano*, for passage to Halifax. From there the sailors were to traverse the Atlantic on board the ocean-liner *Orduña*.**



**They were not to travel alone from St. John’s: ‘D’ Company of the Newfoundland Regiment was also to make the voyage on its way to Scotland to join the Newfoundland contingent already serving there at Edinburgh Castle.**

***(Right above: The photograph of ‘Stephano’ sailing through the Narrows of St. John’s Harbour is by courtesy of the Provincial Archives.)***

**Once having disembarked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool it appears that several of the Naval men were posted directly to a ship. Others were ordered to undergo further training at various Royal Navy establishments and thus, likely having journeyed by train, reported to these bases on or about March 30. In the case of *Seaman Reader*, the destination was to be HMS *Vivid I*.\***

***(Right below: The recently-built passenger liner ‘Orduña’ – constructed in 1913-1914 - was requisitioned during the Great War for use as an armed merchant cruiser and also as a troop transport.***

***Almost twenty years after the Great War she was to be involved with the unfortunate Jewish refugees in the ‘Voyage of the Damned’ affair, the vessel was later also to be used as a troopship and an evacuation transport during the conflict of 1939-1945 before being finally laid up in 1950. – photograph from the Old Ship Picture Galleries 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 only a 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 which were organized around the coast of the United Kingdom during the Great War.*

*HMS Vivid, the base to which Seaman Reader 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 caps.*

*These establishments were at times divided into sections: 'Vivid I' was where the seamen (as opposed to the engine-room personnel, for example, in 'Vivid II') such as Seaman Reader were to be stationed in holding-barracks, there to await a posting to one of His Majesty's ships..*

Having spent from the time of his arrival in southern England at Devonport until April 19, it appears that Seaman Reader was then transferred to – and presumably also changed his cap-band to that of - His Majesty's Trawler *John C. Meikle*.

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

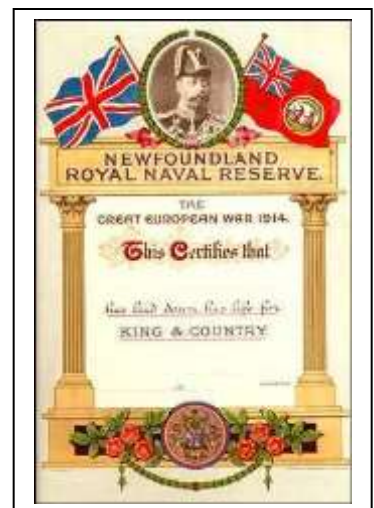


The *John C. Meikle* was a hired trawler, Admiralty Number 436, of one-hundred ninety-four tons, built in 1914 to be registered in the port of North Shields, Number SN.70.. For war-time service she had been armed with a single three-pounder gun. The vessel would be in service from November, 1914, until 1919, performing duties as a mine-sweeper.



Penzance, a coastal town on the southern coast of the county of Cornwall and at the south-western limits of England where the land meets the Atlantic, during the *Great War* was the site of an auxiliary naval base established there in 1915. From Penzance naval vessels were dispatched to escort convoys to France, to survey passing shipping in general and also to be used as rescue-craft for stricken ships. The vessels employed for this purpose were berthed to be maintained and serviced in the local dry-dock and the small harbour adjacent to it.

(Right above: *The local dry-dock is seen in the background just in front of the buildings on the further side of the harbour of Penzance. – photograph (by Ted Mole) from the following web-site: <https://www.penwithlocalhistorygroup.co.uk>*)



(continued)

Whether Seaman Reader was often to ply the waters outside Penzance harbour is not clear, but suffice to say that his time of service there was to be short, only four weeks less a day...and some of those latter days were be spent in the local hospital after he had contracted a case of measles.



(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: *The photograph of Seaman John Reader in naval uniform is from the Find a Grave web-site – the image contributed by Anne (Winsor) Gosse.*)

The son of John Reader (former draper, deceased from typhoid fever on September 27, 1904) and of Mary Ann Reader (née *Brown*\*) of Bonavista, he was also brother to James, Amy, Hubert-John, Julia-Ann, Edith-Beatrice, Albert-George and Ella Grace.



(Right: *The War Memorial which stands in the community of Bonavista honours the sacrifice of Seaman Reader. – photograph from 2010*)

(Right below: *A family memorial stands in the United Church Cemetery in Bonavista in commemoration of the service and sacrifice of Seaman John Reader. – photograph from 2011(?)*)



*\*The couple had married in Bonavista on December 20 of 1877. Mary-Ann was his second wife; the first, Tryphena, had died on December 17, 1875, while giving birth to a daughter, Tryphena-May-Strathie, who herself was soon to pass away not having lived for a year.*

Seaman Reader was reported as having *died in hospital of sickness – measles and complications - at the age of nineteen years: date of birth in Bonavista, Newfoundland, February 8, 1898* (from the *Find a Grave* web-site).

*Seaman Reader 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 Reader 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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 20, 2023.