



Seaman Simeon Rogers (*Rogers* the maiden name of his mother, his baptized name was *Simeon Morris*), Number 1138x, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on a bronze beneath the Caribou at the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

Having apparently decided to offer his services to the naval authorities Simeon Rogers initially presented himself for enlistment in St. John's on October 10 of 1904 whereupon he committed himself to serve for a term of five years, pledging during that time to report – usually annually – for a twenty-eight day period of training on the Naval Reserve Drill-ship HMS Calypso (see below).



Simeon Rogers was apparently the four-hundred sixth volunteer to register with the Reserve and was to serve during this first five-year period as Seaman Rogers, Service Number 13459.

By 1909 he had apparently fulfilled his obligations as it is then recorded that he was for a second time to enroll, this in November of 1909, and to begin a second series of training terms. The last of these occurred in early 1914, not to conclude because of sickness until March 1 at which time he likely returned to his home and to his occupation as a baker, both in the Capital City.

By this time Simeon Rogers had been assigned two further service numbers, 327x, and 1138x, this last being the number which he would carry into the War and by which he would be identified on his war-time service records.

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The events of that summer of 1914 then dictated that Simeon Rogers be summoned to fulfil his commitments to the Crown on August 3\* – the day prior to the British Declaration of War - and he was thus, by *Royal Proclamation*, called upon to report back to HMS *Calypso*, the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) Drill-ship, moored in St. John's Harbour, for the aforesaid war-time service\*\*. And it may also have been at this time – had he not already done so on a previous occasion - that he attested, pledging his allegiance\*\*\* to the King-Emperor, George V.

*\*A second source sites August 13.*

*\*\*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*

*\*\*\*Had he done so in 1904 or 1909, it would have been to the preceding monarch, King Edward VII.*



*(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 from the Royal Collection Trust web-site, 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)*



*(Right: 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.*

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**Note: During the years preceding the Great War the only military force on the Island of Newfoundland – apart from a handful of short-lived 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.**



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

Following those afore-mentioned twelve weeks, his duties un-recorded, spent in St. John's, Seaman Rogers, one of a draft of three-hundred nine Naval Reservists and officers, embarked on November 5-6 onto the *Cunard* ocean-liner *Franconia* which had arrived in St. John's having sailed from New York on her trans-Atlantic commercial way to the United Kingdom.

Their ship then having docked in the English port-city of Liverpool on November 11-12, several of the Reservists were posted directly to a ship. Others were ordered to undergo further training at various Royal Navy establishments and, likely having journeyed by train, reported to these bases on or about November 13.



**(Right above: A relatively new vessel, 'Franconia' had been launched on July 23 of 1910. Remaining un-requisitioned as a troop transport until early 1915, it was to be well over a year later that on 4 October, 1916, while heading for Salonika, she was torpedoed and sunk by a German U-boat to the east of Malta. The ship was not carrying troops at the time, but out of her 314 crew members, 12 died. – image from Wikipedia)**

It was perhaps that Seaman Rogers was to be one of this latter category as he was reportedly dispatched to HMS *Pembroke* upon his disembarkation – but see further below. *Pembroke* was the Royal Naval establishment at the naval town of Chatham on the River Medway, itself a tributary of the better-known River Thames, in the county of Kent. Not only was *Pembroke* a barracks – it operated as such from 1878 until 1983 – but it was the name given to a number of training establishments – a goodly number during the *Great War* - most not far-removed from Chatham, and which were numbered according to the purpose of the training – or otherwise - involved.

*Pembroke I* was the training station for regular seamen and also the location of those holding-barracks from where seamen would sooner or later be attached to one of His Majesty's ships. Thus it may have been *Pembroke I* to which Seaman Rogers was posted.

**\*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 many of whom were never to set eyes on the actual ship in question.**

**(Right: A few of the impressive buildings 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)**



***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 elderly and obsolescent vessels that plied the waters adjacent to the many naval land establishments – and known as stone frigates – were in theory the home ships of the tens, hundreds, thousands of men who laboured on shore.***

***Which is why Seaman Rogers would have worn an HMS ‘Pembroke’ cap-band.***

However, while Seaman Rogers was to be officially *on strength* at *Pembroke* for eleven days, it should be remembered that those eleven days included the time spent crossing the Atlantic Ocean. In fact, he is recorded as having subsequently joined a ship on the eighteenth day of that November, so he may well have been attached to her immediately following his passage from Newfoundland and arrival in England. If not, he was to serve at *Pembroke* for barely a single week.

The vessel in question, the *Duchess of Devonshire*, was a small requisitioned cargo-carrier of some twelve-hundred tons. Re-fitted, then armed with two twelve-hundred pounder naval guns, she had been put into war-time service as an *armed boarding steamer* to carry out inspections of merchant shipping at sea as of October 30 of 1914.



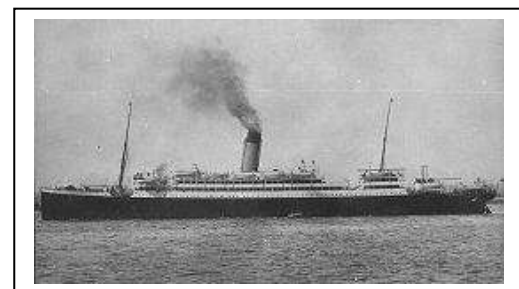
(Right above: *The photograph of His Majesty’s Armed Boarding Steamer Duchess of Devonshire is from the Historical RFA (Royal Fleet Auxiliary) web-site.*)

Unfortunately, the log-books of the *Duchess of Devonshire* are as yet not available; even a record of where Seaman Rogers and his new ship operated during the two years following his arrival on board - on or about November 18, 1914 - is not to be found among his papers. But whatever his duties were, they were to continue for twenty-four months less six days, until November 12 of 1916.



(Right above: *A quick-firing naval twelve-pounder (the weight of the shell) and twelve hundred-weight (1200 lbs. the weight of the barrel and breech) gun, here seen adapted for use in 1941. – photograph taken at the Royal Artillery Museum ‘Firepower’ at Woolwich in 2010)*

On that last-mentioned date, Seaman Rogers was *officially* back at HMS *Pembroke I*, at the Naval Barracks and there awaiting orders. In the meantime it was likely being decided that he merited a period of furlough at home. He was to sail back to Newfoundland.



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When the details of passage had been decided, the ship on which he was to journey was to be an armed merchant cruiser, HMS *Laurentic*. He was not to travel alone: a number of other Newfoundland Naval Reservists, having by this time also having served long enough to merit some furlough at home, were to travel with him – likely to Halifax – on the ship – as well a further few who were members of her crew.

The ship was to sail from Birkenhead, a port adjacent to Liverpool, on that January 23 with a reported four-hundred seventy-five\* persons on board as well as some forty tons of gold with which to buy munitions in North America.

(Preceding page: *The photograph of 'Laurentic', likely seen here in peace-time as no guns are visible on her decks, is from the Naval-History.net web-site*)

*\*While it is recorded that 'Laurentic' was carrying no passengers or troops, it should be remembered that some of those on board were returning home for leave or for repatriation.*

While passing by the north-west coast of Ireland on the morning of January 25, the ship unexpectedly put into the small town of Bunrana in Lough (pronounced *Loch* as in *Loch Ness*) Swilly to put ashore several sick crew-members. At five o'clock on that same afternoon *Laurentic* was under way again.

She then passed through the protective boom at the entrance to Lough Swilly and gathered speed – it was apparently for her speed that she had been chosen to carry the gold as she could out-run most ships and any U-boat. She was barely three kilometres from the coast when she struck two German mines in quick succession and rapidly began to sink; nor after the second explosion was there any power and thus no distress signal could be sent.

(Right above and right: *The Memorial to those who perished on that January 25 of 1916 during the sinking of HMS 'Laurentic'; and the churchyard of St. Mura of the Church of Ireland at Upper Fahan, Ireland, wherein stands the aforesaid Memorial and where many of the dead lie to this day – photographs from 2011*)

There was scarcely time to lower the life-boats although apparently all on board *Laurentic*, apart from perhaps some engine-room personnel who were already dead, were able to board them. It was to do them little good.

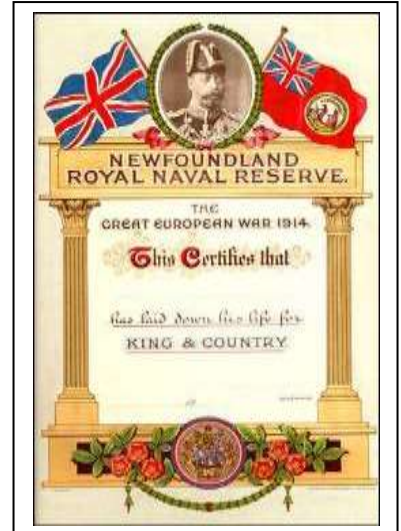


A snow-storm was blowing and most of the men were not clothed to resist it. Any help had to travel the length of the Lough and then through open seas to reach them. Apparently the nearest land could only be reached in the teeth of the gale that was blowing, a wind reckoned to be at minus twelve degrees, and the boats were filling with water.

And those that eventually managed to land found themselves isolated on the rocky, barren, un-inhabited coast of Donegal.

Little wonder, perhaps, that of the four-hundred seventy-five on board *Laurentic*, three-hundred fifty-four were to die.

(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)



The son of Willis Morris, fisherman, and of Susanna (née Rogers\*) of Lower Island Cove, Newfoundland, he was also brother to John-Avalon, Jethro and to Jabez.

\*The couple was married in the community of Lower Island Cove on June 9, 1881.

Simeon Morris (he appears as *Simeon Rogers* only in his military records) was also married, to Bertha McCarte (sic) whom he had wed in St. John's on May 24, 1907. The couple were to parent four children: Gordon, Evelyn, Jean and John – all baptized as *Morris*. His residence at the time of his enlistment is recorded among his papers as William Street in the City.

Bertha (*McCarte*) Morris is also found in the 1935 Census for St. John's West, by which time three other children – too young to have been fathered by Simeon Morris – appear on the ledger: Dorothy (age fifteen), Louise (age thirteen), and Patrick (age nine). No further information *a propos* seems to be available.

Seaman Simeon Rogers was recorded as having died in the...*sinking of HMS Laurentic*...on January 25 of 1917 at the reported age of thirty-two years: date of birth at Lower Island Cove, District of Bay de Verde, Newfoundland, March 29, 1886 (this date from Newfoundland Vital Statistics where, as seen further above, he is documented as *Simeon Morris*), but the year also found as 1895 (from Royal Navy Records).

*Seaman Rogers 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 Simeon Rogers was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



**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.**