

A photograph of the headstone of Seaman Smith's grave in Griquet Cemetery on Newfoundland's Great Northern Peninsula is unfortunately as yet unavailable.

Seaman Stephen Smith, Service Number 1071x, is buried in Griquet Cemetery, White Bay, Newfoundland.

Having decided to volunteer for the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland), Stephen Smith had originally presented himself for enlistment on November 18 of 1913, whereupon he was to undergo a recorded twenty-eight days of training, terminating on December 14 of that same year.

As with all pre-War volunteers, he had *joined-up* for five years' service and would likely have undergone the required annual training of at least twenty-eight days on five occasions during the following years. However, those late months of 1913 cited above saw the only such term of training on *Calypso* in which Stephen Smith is recorded as having participated before world events then intervened and he was to be called to war-time service.

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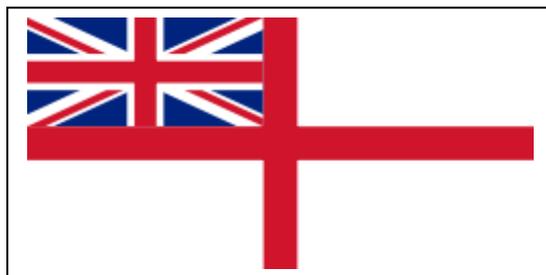
Summoned to service just after the onset of hostilities, Stephen Smith relinquished his occupation, likely that of fisherman, and travelled from his declared residence on the Great Northern Peninsula to St. John's* (but see further below), capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland. There, on August 17 of 1914 – three weeks less a day following 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 mid-August day, Stephen Smith was signed on for war-time service*, was assessed medically, and it was likely to have been at this time – if he had not already done so - that he then attested, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor.

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



**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 at a minimum.

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, H.M.S. '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.



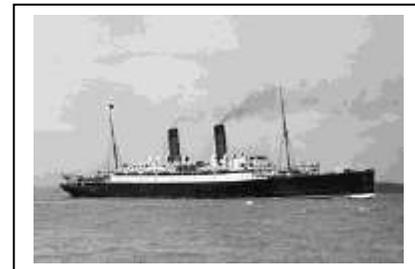
(Right: H.M.S. 'Calypso' in full sail. She was to be re-named 'Briton' in 1916 when a new 'Calypso', a modern cruiser, was launched by the Royal Navy. – photograph by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)

Following some three months of duties in St. John's – no further training has been recorded - Seaman Smith, one of a draft of three-hundred five Naval Reservists, embarked on November 5-6 onto the Cunard ocean-liner *Franconia* on the British-bound stage of its commercial route between New York and Liverpool.



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

Once having arrived in the port-city of Liverpool on November 11, it appears that several of the 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 only hours later.



(Right: 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 submarine to the east of Malta She was not carrying any troops at the time, but out of her 314 crew members, 12 died. – photograph from Wikipedia)

It would appear that Seaman Smith was to be one of this latter category as he was transferred to HMS *Vivid** I upon his disembarkation. He would now serve until December 14 or thereabout of the same year at the Royal Naval training establishment and barracks based at Plymouth-Devonport - perhaps having been ordered to the *Vivid I Division* since it was from the aforesaid barracks that seamen were dispatched to one of His Majesty's ships in need of their services.

(Right below: *One of the imposing main gateways to the once-Royal Navy establishment at Plymouth-Devonport stands to this day. – photograph from 2011(?)*)

**'Vivid' was the name of a series of pre-War and, later, post-War training stations – although during the war it was to revert to the role of a shore-base and barracks in the counties of Devon and Cornwall, and at other sites in the United Kingdom. It was also the name of an elderly, obsolescent, vessel to which all of the hundreds, even thousands, of the personnel serving in the myriad stations were attached, officially even if, as in many cases, they were never to set foot on or even see the ship whose name they wore on their cap.*



All of this was because of the Naval Discipline Act. The rules and regulations covering the conduct of Royal Navy personnel was unique unto itself, and in order for any sailor to be governed by the Act, he had to be part of a ship's crew. If he were serving on land, he still had to be a member of a ship's crew for the Naval Discipline Act to be in effect.

It was often for this reason only that an old ship and the shore-based establishment shared the same name. In the case of 'Vivid' it was an old gun-boat, originally launched in 1873, which served the purpose, at the same time to be used as a harbour-service vessel.

Some twenty-five days after his arrival at *Vivid I* Seaman Smith, on the above-noted December 14, was to be transferred to a ship of the Royal Navy: *HMS Revenge*.

Three ships of that name were to serve in the Royal Navy during the *Great War*. One was a Q-ship, a decoy vessel to attract German submarines to close range before revealing themselves as heavily armed gun-boats – but she did not go into service until 1916.

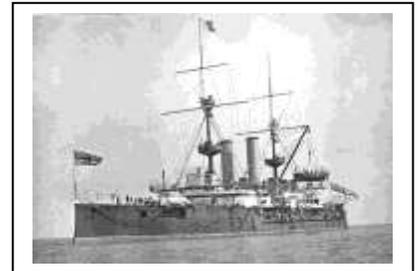
The second such-named was a *Dreadnought-Class* battleship, soon to become *HMS Renown*, but which was still under construction in 1914 and not to be launched until May of 1915. She survived not only the *Great War* but the *Second World War* as well.

The third was a pre-dreadnought battleship which had been launched in 1892 but which had rapidly become obsolescent despite her size, just over fourteen-thousand tons, and her weaponry, four heavy and ten medium guns. She was renamed *Redoubtable* in August of 1915, only to be withdrawn from service in October of that same year and laid up at Portsmouth.

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In the autumn of 1914 the Germans had occupied most of Belgium including a number of ports, some of which were to become U-Boat bases. At other Belgian sites were then situated heavy artillery positions from where to shell Allied forces. To counter this the British employed the Royal Navy and its large naval guns, some mounted on smaller, shallow-draught vessels – monitors – which were able to better navigate the shallow waters of the coast while bombarding the aforesaid targets as well as the occupying German troops in their coastal quarters.

HMS *Revenge*, the elderly battleship, had been a part of this effort although by the time of Seaman Smith having reported to her she had been withdrawn to the Channel port of Dover where she was then to remain for the remainder of her career.



What his duties were to be at this time is not clear, likely the everyday routines and tasks of every naval rating. There were to be some naval encounters in the North Sea in the early days of this period but *Revenge* and *Seaman Smith* appear not to have been involved in any such activity.

(Right above: *The photograph of HMS 'Revenge' seen here in or about 1897, at the time when she was still the most powerful ship of the Royal Navy, is from the 'wikiwand.com' web-site.*)

As seen above, *Revenge* in the autumn of 1914 had been bombarding the Belgian coast and thus *Belgian Coast 1914/15* is to be found among the ship's Battle Honours. Almost identical Honours, *Belgian Coast 1915*, were then awarded to the same ship when she became HMS *Redoubtable* which would have been the period of August, September and October of 1915.



(Right above: *A vintage post-card showing the commercial harbour at Dover purportedly at some time during the years of the 'Great War'. – from the kentww1.com web-site*)

It appears to have been on September 7 that HMS *Redoubtable* was involved with the reportedly successful bombardment of the Belgian town and harbour of Ostend (*Oostende* in Flemish). Unfortunately the French Army's efforts which the naval action had been supporting were to be less rewarding – in fact they had been disastrous.

The name of HMS *Redoubtable* seems to appear only once in the reports of naval operations of those three above-mentioned months. One may surmise that once the bombardment of Ostend terminated, *Redoubtable* was ordered back to her berth in the port of Dover. She then underwent a further refit from October until December of that year before being ordered to Portsmouth where she served as an accommodation ship until 1919.

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But on October 6-7, 1915, Seaman Smith had returned to the Royal Naval facility at Portsmouth-Devonport, HMS *Vivid* – and more precisely, to *Vivid I*. He was apparently to remain there until February 5 of the following year, 1916.

In late 1915 and early 1916 the fifteen year-old British cruiser HMS *Sutlej* was to undergo repairs at Devonport. Available for service in early February of that year, she was re-commissioned in Plymouth on February 6, the day on which Seaman Smith was attached to her. He and his new ship were not to go to sea immediately as supplies were still to be taken on board and commissioning trials were to be undertaken.



It was on February 10, 1916, that HMS *Sutlej* was to leave port en route for harbours on the Portuguese and Spanish islands of the Atlantic*.

(Right above: The photograph of the cruiser HMS ‘Sutlej’ at anchor – the vessel named for two rivers in India – is from the ‘Wikipedia’ web-site.)

**Although Spain was to be neutral during the entire Great War, Great Britain and France – and later Italy – were to pressure Spain into practising a flexible policy vis-à-vis that neutrality and ports were often available to Entente warships in spite of the international understandings of what neutrality comprised.*

Portugal had also declared neutrality prior to the War but in March of 1916 declared for the Triple Entente which then allowed her ports free access to Entente shipping. The early calls of HMS ‘Sutlej’ into Portuguese ports may have been in anticipation of this declaration. Portuguese troops were stationed in northern France in the spring of 1917 in positions not far from those of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment.*

**France, Russia and Great Britain*

It should be remembered that these two nations, Spain and Portugal, were in possession of several Atlantic islands and archipelagos - the Canaries, the Azores, the Cape Verde Islands and Madeira – which were strategically important for naval operations.

For the next fourteen months HMS *Sutlej* was to be patrolling and otherwise serving off the coast of West and North-West Africa.

For Seaman Smith, however, his time on board the vessel was to be appreciably shorter. On July 11, 1916, while in port at St. Vincent in the Portuguese Cape Verde Islands, his service ended and he disembarked from *Sutlej* for the return journey to Devonport, likely on the provisions ship which had been in St. Vincent at the time. Thus he was then to find himself back on the books of *Vivid I* although the exact date on which he reported back...*to duty*...does not appear in his sparse Service Record.

His one-hundred fifty-two days spent off the African coast patrolling and inspecting shipping had included nothing more exotic than the everyday tasks and duties of a seaman on board one of His Majesty’s Ships.

Four months were to be spent by Seaman Smith at *Vivid I* during the summer and autumn of 1916 before, on November 6-7, he was transferred yet again; on this occasion – which was to be a brief one – it was to another of His Majesty’s shore-based establishments: *HMS President III*.

That 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 evolve 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 Smith’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 Smith would have set foot on her deck – or even seen her – is not clear. – photograph from Wikipedia)*

What Seaman Smith’s duties attached to *President III* were to be for the subsequent seventeen days is not clear although they were not likely to have included the finances of the Royal Navy. They were likely, however, to have been of little importance as after that brief episode he was back at *HMS Vivid* for a further nineteen days during which time the Admiralty was to find another ship for him, one on which he was to serve for fifteen months.

The four-thousand ton collier *Dunclutha*, re-fitted for her new role in 1916, appears to have also sailed under the names of *Champney* and *Stamford*, likely to keep her identity concealed – and any and all other details, such as her weaponry, about her – in fact, it appears that, *officially*, she and the other such vessels did not exist. She was thereupon employed as a Q-ship, a decoy vessel, usually a smaller ship, whose size was to lure U-boats to the surface, confident that they had an easy prize on their hands. As the submarine neared its victim, all pretence would be discarded and the Q-ship would reveal herself to be a heavily armed ship ready to blow the submarine out of the water.

This deception worked for a while at the outset, but the German U-Boat commanders were quick learners and the Q-ship success rate rapidly diminished. In fact, some historians feel that this ruse was a factor in the Germans subsequently adopting the policy of torpedoing ships without warning: the decoy-ships were not the hoped-for success.

The Q-ships worked in secret and few records of their activities or of the ships themselves or of their crews appear to have been kept. *Dunclutha* herself was to survive the *Great War* and was eventually returned to her owner. But whether she had ever lured any German submarine to its doom appears not to have been documented.



(Right: *The photograph of...’A hidden gun on a British Q-ship’...is from the ‘historic-uk.com’ web-site.)*

Seaman Smith was to serve on *Dunclutha* from December 15, 1916, until March 16 of 1918, after which he returned to *Vivid III* which was the Royal Naval Division Trawler Section. Whether the Authorities were planning his further service on one of those smaller boats is not clear; it may unfortunately have been that by that time he was beginning to exhibit symptoms of the malady to which he was soon to succumb.

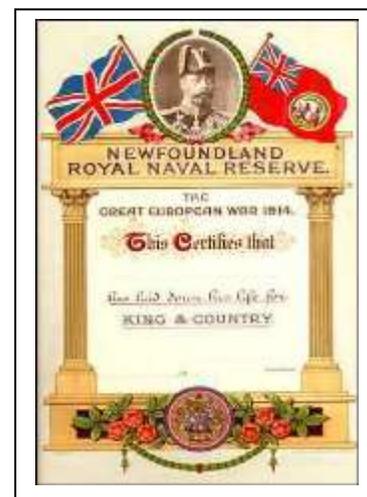
On June 18, 1918, Seaman Smith was once more the responsibility of HMS *Briton* in St. John's although exactly when he was to again cross the Atlantic to put foot on her deck appears not to have been documented. He was diagnosed as having contracted pulmonary tuberculosis and invalided from *Briton* on July 22 of the same year. Whether he was to enter hospital in St. John's for treatment, to return to his home in Griquet or to stay at his parents' residence in the capital city is not to be found among his few papers.

Whatever the case, he had only four more months to live.

The son of Elijah Smith, fisherman, and of Ann Grace Smith (née *Quinton*) of Griquet (French Shore) on the Great Northern Peninsula – but their address later also recorded as 1352, New Gower Street, in St. John's - he was also brother to Louise-Quinton and to Arthur-William.

Seaman Stephen Smith is recorded as having died on November 18, 1918, in an apparently unspecified locale at the *reported* age of twenty-three years, the cause pulmonary tuberculosis: date of birth at St-Lunaire (*St. Lunaire*), Newfoundland, June 27, 1895 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).

(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 Smith served only in the Royal Navy and was not in the service of Canada as recorded elsewhere, notably by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Seaman Stephen Smith was *officially* entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, 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.