



Seaman Peter Bennoit, Number 1234x of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland), lies in Gillingham Cemetery in the United Kingdom: Grave reference R.C.8.387.

(continued)

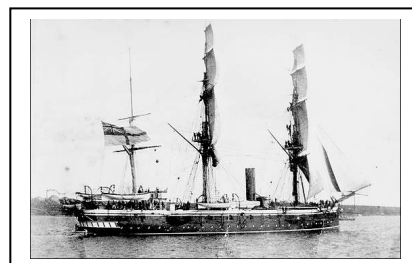
Having decided to *answer the call*, fisherman Peter Bennoit travelled from the west coast of the island to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on October 14 of 1914, he reported...*to duty*...on the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that same October 14 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 began a period of training which ended on November 10. He passed a satisfactory medical appraisal on October 15 and also likely attested at or about this time, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V.

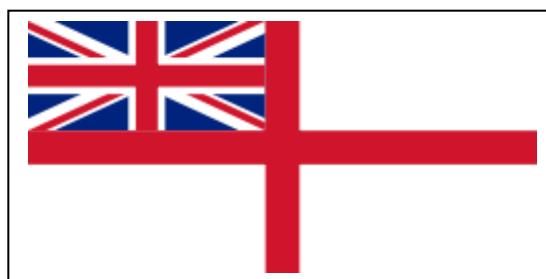
(Right: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India: as a boy and young man he had served in the Royal Navy from 1877 until 1891 and always retained a fondness for the Senior Service. – The photograph of the King in the uniform of an Admiral of the Fleet is from the Royal Collection Trust web-site and taken circa 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.***

(Preceding page: 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)

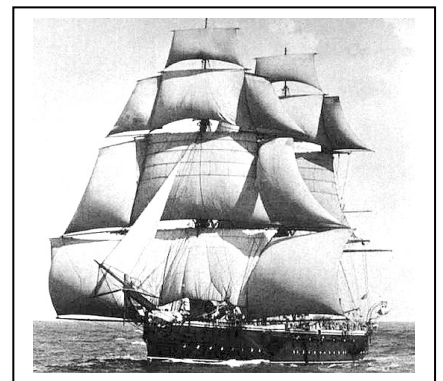
Note: During the years preceding the Great War the only military force on the Island of Newfoundland – apart from a handful of ill-fated local attempts – was to be the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland). Even so, it was to be some thirty years after the withdrawal of British troops from the Dominion 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.

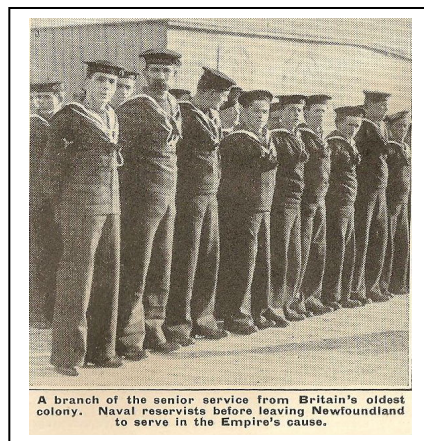


(Right adjacent: HMS 'Calypso' in full sail. She was to be re-named 'Briton' in 1916 when a new 'Calypso', a modern cruiser, was launched by the Royal Navy. – Royal Navy photograph by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)

Following some three weeks of training in St. John's, Seaman Bennoit, one of a draft of three-hundred five naval reservists, embarked on November 5-6 onto the Cunard ocean-liner Franconia on the trans-Atlantic British-bound leg of its commercial route between New York and Liverpool.

(Right below: 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 disembarked in the port-city of Liverpool on November 11, it appears that several of the men were thereupon 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 November 15-16.



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



Seaman Bennoit was to report to HMS *Pembroke**, the naval establishment at Chatham on the River Medway, itself a tributary of the better-known River Thames, in the county of Kent. Not only was it a barracks – it operated from 1878 until 1983 – but it was the name given to a number of training establishments, mostly not far-removed from Chatham, which were numbered according to the training involved.

Pembroke I was the base for regular seamen and it was likely to *Pembroke I* to which Seaman Bennoit was to be attached to await a posting to one of His Majesty's ships.

**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 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 Bennoit would have worn an HMS 'Pembroke' hat-band.

(Preceding page: *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*)

According to his Service Record, Seaman Bennoit was on strength at 'Pembroke' from November 6, 1914, until January 20 of 1915, a period which would have included the days spent at sea traversing the Atlantic and also those of his hospitalization, perhaps at nearby Gillingham, prior to his passing.

The son of Peter H. Bennoit, fisherman and sporting guide (the name found spelled as *Benoit* in many sources), and of Selina Bennoit (also found as *Helena* or *Ellen* in many sources) of Main River, St. George, in the District of the same name, Newfoundland, he was reportedly brother to Joseph, Adolphus, John, Peter*, Michael, Ellen and to Jane** (from the 1911 Census).



**A Peter Benoit is recorded as having been born on September 5, 1893 (Vital Statistics), in 1899 (in the 1911 Census) and then as having died at the age of eighteen years, thus born in 1887. Thus far any certainty has proved elusive*

***There are other discrepancies to be found in the same sources a propos the date of birth for at least his two brothers Adolph(us) and John.*

Seaman Bennoit 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 Peter Bennoit was reported as having died, likely in the Royal Naval Hospital in the nearby town of Gillingham where he was to be buried, on January 20 of 1915, from *mastoiditis* (infection of the inner ear). Date of birth in St. George (whether this is the community or the district is unclear), Newfoundland, May 15, 1896 (from his enlistment papers).



(Right above: 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 Peter Bennoit 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. Last updated – January 22, 2023.