



Seaman Harry Hooper Bourden, Number 2793, lies in Ford Park (formerly *Plymouth Old*) Cemetery, *Pennycomequick*, in the County of Devon grave reference K.26.41..

In late April - early May of 1917, Harry Hooper Bourden travelled from the town of Twillingate in the District of the same name to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, where, on the fourth day of that latter month he reported...*to duty*...on the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Briton* (formerly HMS *Calypso*) moored in the harbour (see further below).

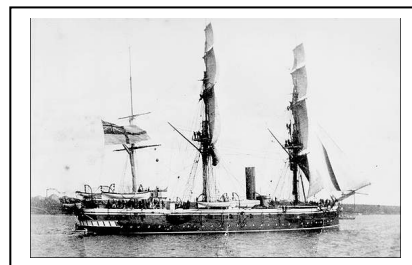
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On that May 4, 1917, he enlisted into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for the *Duration of the War* and then on the morrow underwent the required medical assessment. Harry Hooper Bourden also likely attested at this time, pledging 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 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’ (later ‘Briton’) 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.

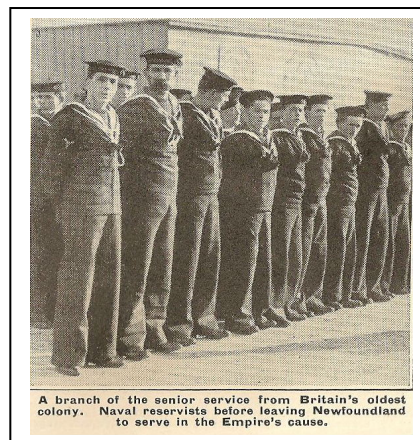
Just fewer than four-hundred men were sought to enroll as seamen – apparently automatically at the rank of Able Seaman - and to present themselves annually in St. John's for five years in order to train for a period of twenty-eight days per annum. Allowed to report at a time of their own choosing, it is perhaps not surprising that these volunteers – mostly fishermen – were to opt to train during the winter months when fishing work was minimal.

(Right: 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)



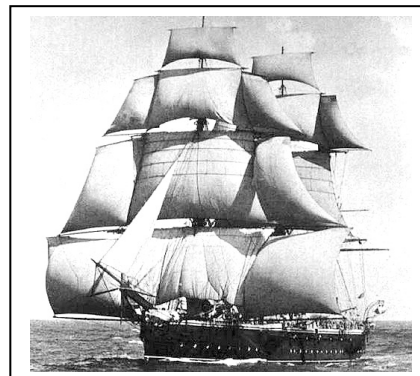
Expenses were apparently defrayed for the most part by the British (Imperial) Government and an attempt was made to ensure the number of recruits would be kept constantly at a maximum. This practice and policy was then to be continued up until the onset of hostilities some twelve years later.

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, 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 above: H.M.S. '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, taken in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)



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(Preceding page: *The C-Class cruiser 'Calypso' of 1916, seen here on an un-recorded date during the later years of the Great War, was to be sunk by an Italian submarine in 1940. – from Wikipedia*)

The service records of Seaman Bourden appear not to document his travels overseas any further than the Canadian province of Nova Scotia: the passenger list of the *Reid Newfoundland Company* vessel *SS Kyle* records the crossing of a detachment of sixty-three(?) Naval Reservists from Port aux Basques, Newfoundland, to North Sydney, on the night of June 27-28 of 1917.

Among the Draft was Seaman Harry Hooper Bourden who, like his fellow Reservists, was *en route* by train to Halifax*, there...*to gain...ship*. At the time, Halifax was the major port for movements of military personnel across the Atlantic to the United Kingdom by troop transport, a system at times to be used by the (Royal) Newfoundland Regiment and by the Newfoundland Forestry Corps. However, the ship in question on this occasion does not appear to have been identified.

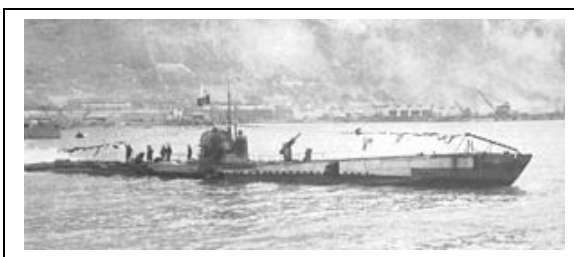
**They had already crossed the Island of Newfoundland by express train from St. John's the day and night before, the journey taking some twenty-four hours.*

Nor do the records show whether in fact Seaman Bourden was to traverse the Atlantic Ocean on this occasion. The possibility exists that he was to join the *Amy B. Silver* (see below) in Halifax and to spend the following four months based there sailing and operating on the Grand Banks – and it would appear that he was not the only Newfoundlander to work on her.

Seaman Bourden's sparse Service Records show that once having disembarked at an un-recorded destination, he was immediately ordered to report directly to a ship. She was the re-fitted schooner *Amy B. Silver** and he is documented as having officially joined the vessel on July 17 on which date he was promoted to the rank of Second Hand.

**Lloyd's of London had a sailing-ship of that name and constructed in 1912 on its register. Built in Bridgewater Nova Scotia, she was based in nearby Lunenburg.*

Even today there appears not to be a great amount of information about the *Amy B. Silver* or the other ships that served the same nebulous purpose – for the vessel on which Seaman Bourden was now to serve was a *Q-ship*, secretive vessels as will be recounted below.



(Right above: *The photograph of U-Boat UC 93, seen here in 1918, is from Wikipedia.*)

In the early days of the *Great War* submarines operated by what was almost a code of chivalry, at least towards merchant and passenger shipping: the ship to be attacked was done so by the submarine on the surface. If the submarine's commander decided to sink the ship – if it was a passenger ship it was often allowed to continue on its way – the crew of the vessel was granted time to take to the boats.

The submarine then did its destructive work by gunfire or torpedo before proceeding on its way – not without, at times, having directed the life-boats towards the nearest port*.

**This was true even as late as 1916. An example is the Bowring Brothers' ship, the SS 'Stephano' – sister-ship of 'Florizel' – which was sunk off the American East Coast in that year but without loss of life.*

Despite this handicap under which the submarines operated, merchant shipping losses mounted and not every encounter was an exercise in nautical chivalry: *Lusitania* comes to mind - although she may have been carrying war materials.

The British thus decided to counter the U-boat danger with the introduction of Decoy-ships or *Q-ships*, heavily-armed vessels playing the role of potential victim, even to the point of flying neutral flags. Once the surfaced submarine came close enough, the flags were quickly changed for British ensigns, the concealed guns were un-veiled, and the vulnerable submarine had to fight it out, often not very successfully.

In the beginning the ruse worked, but less so as time passed, and as one might surmise, fewer submarine commanders surfaced to sink their targets. Many vessels were now lost without any warning being issued.

The *Amy B. Silver* was a *Q-ship*. A schooner built in 1912, she was converted and armed to come into service in July of 1917 at the time of Seaman Bourden's arrival from Newfoundland. Where his ship was stationed appears not to be recorded but it could have been Queenstown* in what is today the harbour of Cobh (pronounced Cove) on the south coast of the Republic of Ireland; or it may have been Milford Haven in the south of the Principality of Wales.



Then again, perhaps she was stationed in Halifax, Nova Scotia**.

**It has been surmised that the 'Q' in 'Q-ship' refers to Queenstown where several of these vessels were based but thus far, apparently, nothing to confirm this speculation has been found.*

***One source – the web-site 'For Posterity's Sake, a Royal Canadian Navy Historical Project' - has her as being a fishing schooner operating on the Grand Banks.*

(Right above: Naval guns were concealed in myriad ways on innocuous-looking vessels to be revealed at only the last moment. – photograph from Wikipedia)

How successful Seaman Bourden and the *Amy B. Silver* were to be during the months that he served on board her is not clear*, but the statistics show that gradually it was the U-boat that was winning this part of the war. He served on her as Second Hand from the time of his arrival in the United Kingdom until November 22 of the same 1917.

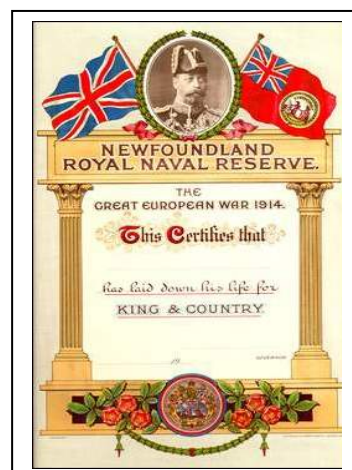
**The Q-ships were a closely-guarded secret and many of the pertinent records and other documents, if kept, were apparently subsequently destroyed.*

On November 22-23, 1917, Seaman Bourden left service on the *Amy B. Silver*. In fact, there is a suggestion that the ship herself was also to be taken out of service at this time. Of the apparently several Newfoundland on board her, some were transferred to HMCS *Niobe* and stationed in Halifax, while it appears that in the case of Seaman Bourden, his record now becomes a twelve-month void.

At some time during this period he crossed the Atlantic to the United Kingdom and was attached to HMS *Vivid III*, at the time the establishment's *Trawler Division*, but whether or not he was to serve on one of those smaller craft has not been documented.

At the same time some of his former crew-mates on the *Amy B. Silver* were serving on HMCS *Niobe* as seen above before being to smaller craft which were engaged in defensive work along Canada's east coast. Once again, however, the name of Seaman Bourden does not appear on any available roster.

(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 Bourden was to be placed on the nominal roll of HMS *Vivid III* on November 23 of 1918, exactly one year following his discharge from the *Amy B. Silver* according to his personal file – an entry which is perhaps too much of a coincidence.

At some time during that year, however, Seaman Bourden was to make his way to the United Kingdom and 1918 was a year during which the disease come to be known as the *Spanish 'Flu* was rampant. There appear to be no record of when he started to exhibit the symptoms of the malady but latterly he was to be admitted into the Royal Naval Hospital in Plymouth.

(Right: The sacrifice of Harry H. Bourden is honoured on this plaque affixed to the outer wall of the Old Methodist Church in the community of Twillingate. – photograph from 2015)



The son of William Bourden, former fisherman who died of endocarditis on November 17 of 1919, and of Elizabeth Bourden (née *Hawkins** - who committed suicide on September 9 of 1920), of the District of Twillingate community of Jenkins' Cove, he was also brother to Ashley.

*The couple had married in Twillingate on November 9 of 1889.

(Right: The life and death of Harry H. Bourden is commemorated on this stele which stands in Durrell's Arm United Church Cemetery, Twillingate. – photograph from 2015)



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Seaman Harry Hooper Bourden is recorded as having...*died of influenza and the ensuing pneumonia*...at the Royal Naval Hospital, Plymouth, on December 11, 1918, at the *reported* age of twenty-two years: date of birth in Jenkins Cove, Twillingate, Newfoundland, June 23, 1894 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register and his enlistment papers).

Seaman Bourden served in the Royal Navy and was not in the service of Canada – even if he was to have served on HMCS ‘Niobe’ - as reported in some sources, notably the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Seaman Harry Hooper Bourden was entitled to 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 22, 2023.