



Seaman David Butler, Number 1167x, of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) is buried in Ford Park (formerly *Plymouth Old*) Cemetery, *Pennycomequick*, in the English County of Devon. He shares his grave with Royal Navy stokers Peter Couburn and Michael Whelan.

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Having already been enlisted into the Reserve on January 8 of 1914, David Butler was to enroll for a five-year term of service and to undergo a successful medical assessment on the same day. He was, on February 2, to complete the first of what would have been five annual training periods of twenty-eight days and this may also have been the time when he attested and would pledge 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 attired in the uniform of an Admiral of the Fleet is from the Royal Collection Trust web-site and taken in or about 1935.)



This may have been so. However, the events of that summer of 1914 were now to intervene and to dictate that David Butler was now to fulfil his obligations to the Crown.

David Butler, having returned home in February of 1914, was to receive a summons to service from the Naval Authorities whereupon he travelled from Bay Roberts to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on August 5 of 1914, he reported...to duty...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS Calypso, moored in the harbour (see below).

**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.

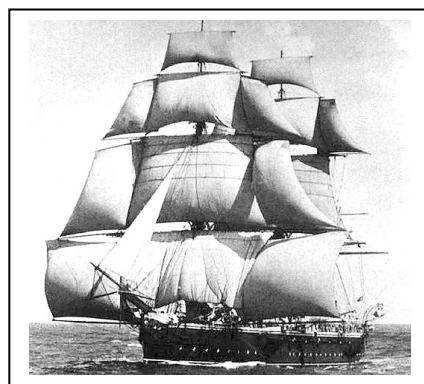
Just fewer than four-hundred men were sought to enroll as seamen – apparently automatically at the rank of Able Seaman - and to present themselves annually in St. John's for five years in order to train for a period of twenty-eight days per annum. Allowed

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 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 prepared 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 of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) were to make their way to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, 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 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)

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



Following those afore-mentioned three months spent in St. John's, Seaman Butler, promoted by this time from the rank of seaman recruit and 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 way to the United Kingdom.

Their ship then having docked in the English port-city of Liverpool on November 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.



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(Preceding page: A relatively new vessel, 'Franconia' had been launched on July 23 of 1910. Remaining 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 Butler would now serve until on or about December 12 of the same year at the Royal Naval training establishment *Vivid I** - this particular Division a facility for seamen rather than for specialists - based at Devonport. As is to be seen, other sources disagree about the dates.

(Right below: The imposing main gateway 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.*



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.



(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)

The date of Seaman Butler's admission into hospital at Plymouth seems not to be found among the scant records available. But those same records and also a copy of Royal Navy documents of casualties both report that he died in hospital of influenza and of the ensuing pneumonia on December 16, 1914*.

**The Newfoundland Vital Statistics cite his death as having occurred on an unlikely November 16 of 1914.*



(Preceding page: *The War Memorial which stands in the Conception Bay community of Bay Roberts honours the sacrifice of Seaman David Butler.* – photograph from 2011)

Seaman Butler 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.

The son of John Butler and of the late Mary Butler of Butlersville, Bay Roberts, Seaman Butler was a *recorded* twenty-three years of age at the time of his passing: date of birth in Londonderry, Ireland, October 4 (also found as October 7) of 1891 (from his enlistment papers).

Seaman David Butler 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.

