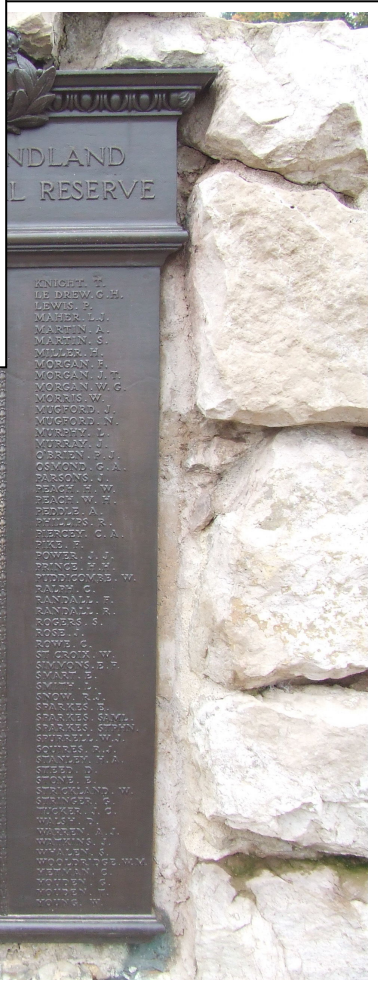


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On that July day he enlisted* for the first time into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for the...*Duration of the War***...and underwent the required medical assessment on the morrow. He also likely attested at this time, pledging 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.)



*****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.)

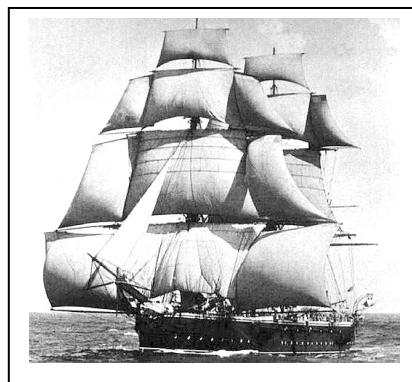
****The Union Flag is commonly referred to as the ‘Union Jack’; this is, in fact, a misnomer since a flag is referred to as a ‘Jack’ only when flown from the bow of a ship.***

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 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.

(Preceding page: *HMS 'Calypso' in full sail. She was to be re-named 'Briton' in early 1916 when a new 'Calypso', a modern cruiser, was about to be launched by the Royal Navy. – This photograph, taken of the 'Newfoundland Calypso' by the Royal Navy in 1898, is 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)*

(Right below: *The newly-constructed 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)*

Seven weeks less a day after having reported to HMS Briton, and having been promoted by this time from the rank of Seaman Recruit, the now-Seaman Coates was to board ship for trans-Atlantic passage to the United Kingdom and to overseas service.

The ship was the SS Sicilian at the time making its third – and last - direct ocean crossing of the year from St. John's. On this occasion it was again to carry personnel of the Newfoundland Regiment – a draft of two-hundred forty-two officers and *other ranks* that was also leaving for overseas service although their destination was to be the Regimental Depot in Scotland rather than Royal Navy establishments in southern England.



(Right above: *Some sixteen years previously - as of 1899 when 'Sicilian' was launched – the vessel had served as a troop-ship and transport carrying men, animals and equipment to South Africa for use during the Second Boer War. During the Great War she was apparently requisitioned as a troopship on only one occasion: in October of 1914 she was a vessel of the armada which transported the (1st) Canadian Division overseas to the United Kingdom. She otherwise continued to work commercially between Great Britain and Canada for her owners, the Allan Line and later Canadian Pacific, at times carrying soldiery if and when her schedule allowed.*

Upon the arrival of Sicilian in British waters, the ship proceeded to the south-coast Royal Naval port of Devonport where the first contingent of the Newfoundland Regiment had landed with the (1st) Canadian Division in October of 1914.

(Right: *A no-longer bustling Devonport Harbour, today bereft of its former importance – photograph from 2012)*



(continued)

Having arrived in port on or about September 9, from there, while the soldiers now boarded a train for the journey north to Scotland and other sailors were dispatched onwards to their English destinations, Seaman Coates remained *in situ* to report to the Royal Navy complex of HMS *Vivid*, established there at Plymouth-Devonport.

Vivid I (the establishment had several Divisions) was a training ground for seaman recruits and also one of the holding barracks for already-trained seamen awaiting a posting to one of His Majesty's ships and it was *Vivid I* to which Seaman Coates was then attached for a period of five weeks less a day.

**The Royal Navy had a disciplinary system which in certain ways differed from civil – and even Army – law; but for it to be employed, a sailor had to be attached to a ship. While at sea, of course, this posed no problem, but when a sailor was performing duties on land that were not associated directly to a particular ship he still had to be held accountable for any untoward behaviour.*

The Navy's training establishments were for the most part on land: Devonport (although apparently only a shore base and a holding-barracks for seamen awaiting postings during the Great War), Chatham, and Portsmouth for example, were terrestrial facilities for many thousands of naval personnel, some of who were permanently stationed there. Thus the practice became to base an elderly or even obsolete ship in the nearby port to be, nominally, the vessel to which this personnel was to be attached. This appears to have been the procedure for the large number of shore bases organized around the coast of the United Kingdom during the Great War.

HMS 'Vivid', the base to which Seaman Coates had been ordered after his arrival in the United Kingdom from Newfoundland, was not only all the buildings and facilities on shore, but also a small, elderly, nondescript depot ship (originally HMS 'Cukoo', built 1873), to which all the naval personnel was attached and was the name to be emblazoned on the bands of their cap.

These establishments were at times divided into sections: the holding barracks at 'Vivid I' was where the seamen (as opposed to engine-room personnel, for example, who were sent to 'Vivid II') such as Seaman Coates were likely initially to be stationed – as well as potential signallers and telegraphers – to await service on one of His Majesty's ships.

(Right: A main gateway to the once-Royal Navy establishment at Plymouth-Devonport – photograph from 2011(?))



On October 1-2 of that 1916 Seaman Coates was dispatched to answer the summons to a ship: the vessel was to be the monitor HMS *Terror* based at the time at Dover on England's Kentish coast.

**The coastal town of Dover lies on that part of the English coast which lies closest to France and the port-town of Calais. The Dover Straits, some thirty kilometres wide, allow vessels from the Baltic sea, from northern Europe and from the North Sea to have access*

to the English Channel – or La Manche as the French call it – and from there the Atlantic Ocean. Today it is the world’s second busiest waterway – and it was already critical to British interests at the time of the Great War.

Even some seventy years prior to that conflict the British had seen fit in the mid-nineteenth century to construct a harbour for commercial, for cross-Channel and for naval reasons. The port of Dover today is the main maritime link between the United Kingdom and the continent – and the more recently-constructed ‘Chunnel’ (Channel Tunnel) passes almost directly underneath it.



(Right: One of the entrances to the port of Dover as seen from the Dover Straits with, flanking it to the right, the well-known White Cliffs – photograph from 2010)

With the Germans having occupied a part of the Belgian coast almost opposite Dover and with a goodly number of British vessels, both commercial and naval – to which should be added the troop transports which from there and from nearby Folkestone were, by the end of the War, to have carried some five million troops across to the Western Front – using the aforementioned waterway, the British created the ‘Dover Patrol’.



The biggest fear was that the Germans would employ U-boats and torpedo-boats based on the Belgian coast to attack British shipping, and would also set mines in those waters. In fact they did although it was the mines that were to become the greatest threat to shipping.

Thus began the ‘Dover Patrol’. In its early days it was a motley collection of old, even obsolete war-ships, for the most part destroyers, to which was very soon to be added a number of requisitioned and purpose-built small vessels, notably fishing-boats, trawlers and drifters, lightly-armed but capable of mine-sweeping and keeping their German opposite numbers at bay.



(Right above: Armed trawlers of the ‘Dover Patrol’ in the harbour at Dover – The undated photograph is from the Imperial War Museum web-site.)

But while much of the work of the *Dover Patrol* was to keep open the vital shipping-lanes and to protect England’s numerous east-coast and south-coast harbours, at times it was to go to the offensive and harass the ports of occupied Belgium on the far side of the North Sea.

(continued)

A ship was designed for that particular sort of purpose – in fact, one had been designed a century before – a vessel with heavy guns and a shallow draught, capable of sailing in shallow waters, even rivers, and from there bombarding targets with heavy guns from close range. Such a ship was a monitor.

HMS *Terror* was not launched until May of 1916. She was a relatively light warship of just eight-thousand tons but armed with eight four-inch guns and, primarily, two huge weapons of fifteen-inch calibre.

(Right: The ‘Erubus-Class’ monitor, HMS ‘Terror’, shown here in 1933 in the waters of Plymouth Sound, was to serve again during the first years of the Second World War, to then be sunk off the North African coast in February of 1941. Her sister-ship ‘Erubus’ would subsequently go on to support the Allied D-Day landings of June 6, 1944, in Normandy. – photograph from Wikipedia)



Seaman Coates was to remain with *Terror* for some eight weeks, until November 25, before returning to *Vivid I*. Unfortunately, exactly what his duties had been during that period of service on the ship appears not to have been documented among his papers.

A further twenty-three days at *Vivid I* were then to pass before, on December 19-20 of that 1916, Seaman Coates was thereupon dispatched to a second shore-based naval establishment, further along the coast and to the east, to the naval port-city of Portsmouth and to *Victory I*.

HMS ‘Victory’, the base to which Seaman Coates had now been ordered was not only all the buildings and facilities on shore, but also HMS ‘Victory’ the warship, the vessel from which Admiral Nelson had directed the Battle of Trafalgar – although the ship’s illustrious history is not limited to that one single incident.

It was also the name which all the sailors attached to HMS ‘Victory’ were to have emblazoned on the bands of their caps.

(Right: HMS ‘Victory’ is seen here in dry dock in the southern English naval port-city of Portsmouth where she has been since the late 1920s – photograph from Wikipedia)



His attachment to *HMS Victory I* was not to be a posting of long duration, only another twenty-four days before being transferred to the nearby Royal Navy Gunnery School.

**HMS ‘Excellent’ was the name – and also still is the name - of the Royal Navy’s Gunnery School which had been established in a ship of the same name in 1829, the vessel being permanently moored just outside Portsmouth dockyard. As the years passed the ships were to be replaced, but each in turn was to be named HMS ‘Excellent’.*



(Preceding page: *Drill on a naval gun on 'Whale Island' during the period of the Great War – from Wikipedia*)

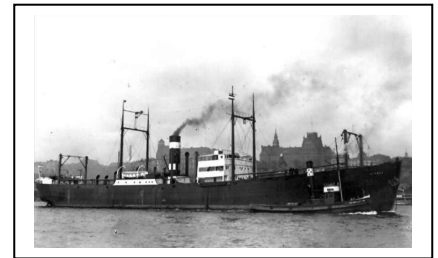
And as the years passed, the use evolved of the nearby Whale (originally 'Whaley') Island as facilities were constructed on it. In 1885 the Gunnery School was moved from the ship of the time to be re-established on the island itself.

(Right: *The Royal Navy Memorial stands on the coast at Portsmouth from where may be seen 'Whale Island' – photograph from 1917*)



At the very end of his term of five weeks and a day at HMS *Excellent*, Seaman Coates received a promotion to the rank of Acting Leading Seaman and was dispatched to HMS *President III*, yet another of His Majesty's land-based establishments, this one based on the River Thames, London.

While *President III* was reportedly an Accounting Branch of the Royal Navy at times situated outside the British capital city, it must at times have also served as a holding-station for personnel awaiting service afloat as it was apparently from there – the date is not recorded - that Leading Seaman Coates was ordered attached to the steamship '*Hermes*'.



The following is a adapted account of 'The Sinking of 'Hermes'', an article found on the 'Scorpiosail.com' web-site.

The SS 'Hermes' by the time of the 'Great War' was a Finnish ship, reportedly the largest vessel in that country's merchant fleet, which was requisitioned on February 10 of 1917 by the British while she was in port at Glasgow.*

**The Duchy of Finland had been a part of the Russian Empire since the early nineteenth century.*

Having had perhaps only a single gun installed on her in the few days following her requisitioning, and also in the mean-time having sailed to South Wales to take on a cargo of coal, on April 19 'Hermes' sailed for the Russian port of Archangel (Arkhangelsk) on the White Sea, a voyage which would take the ship around the northernmost tip of Norway.

Twenty-two days into her journey, 'Hermes', having circumnavigated Norway and being about to enter Russian waters, encountered the German submarine U-45.

The number of torpedoes fired by U-45 at 'Hermes' has not been recorded but apparently they all missed. The submarine thereupon rose to the surface with the intention of sinking her by gun-fire but a duel then ensued between the German gun-crew and the two Royal Navy gunners with their weapon on board 'Hermes'.

The steamer eventually slowed and then halted, its crew took to the boats and 'Hermes' was sunk by gun-fire. Its task completed, the submarine left the scene and eventually

returned to its base at Emden. The life-boats and their occupants were apparently left to the mercy of the elements and were not heard of again.

The U-45 was later reported as having been sunk by a British submarine off the Irish coast in September of that same year, 1917.

One of the two reported Royal Navy Gunners on board *Hermes* was Leading Seaman Harold Coates.

The son of Philip Coates, former courier, deceased of heart failure on January 17, 1921, and of Emma Coates (née *Woolridge, deceased of general debility on November 4 of 1906), of the community of Fogo, Seaman Coates was also brother to George**, to Thomas and to Amelia.**

***The couple had married in Fogo on February 7 of 1881.**

(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)

Leading Seaman Harold Coates is considered to have died on that Saturday of April 28, 1917, at the recorded age of nineteen years: date of birth in Fogo, Newfoundland, January 11, 1898 (from his enlistment papers).

(Right: The War Memorial in the community of Fogo honours the sacrifice of both Harold and George Coates. – photograph from 2014)

Leading Seaman Coates 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.

Leading Seaman Harold Coates was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



****Seaman George Coates, reportedly an 'Old Reservist, Number 1147x, reported for duty to HMS 'Calypso' on November 13 of 1914 and was to take ship on the SS 'Carthaginian' for passage to the United Kingdom and for Overseas Service just days later, on the 18-19 of that same autumn month.**

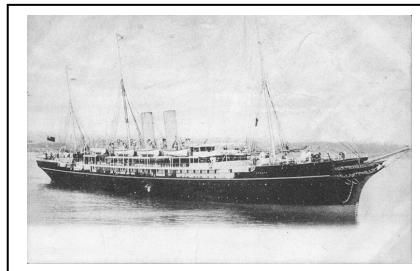
Having arrived in England he was immediately ordered attached to and armed merchant cruiser, HMS 'Viknor', a ship of the Northern Patrol, and was soon at sea.

(Right below: *The luxury cruise-liner 'Atrato', later to be commissioned as HMS 'Viknor', seen here in her pre-War condition – from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site)*

'Viknor' was on a return journey to Liverpool from her patrol when she was lost, to either a German mine or to the harsh elements. Her entire crew perished.

Like his brother Harold, Seaman George Coates has no known grave but the sea and is commemorated in the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

A more complete account of Seaman George Coates' all-too-short war-time contribution is to be found elsewhere among these files.



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.