



Seaman Adam Coles, Number 2069x, having no known last resting-place but the sea, is buried in Brooklyn Methodist Cemetery, Bonavista South.

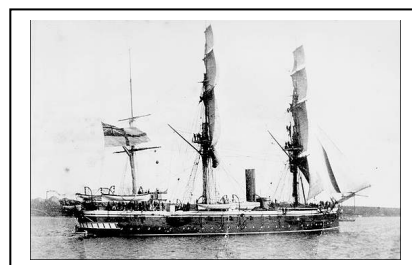
Having decided to answer the call of the naval authorities for volunteers, he relinquished his occupation, likely that of a fisherman and thereupon travelled from the Bonavista Bay community of Brooklyn to St. John's*, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on April 13 of 1916, Adam Coles reported...to duty ...on the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that same April 13 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 successfully underwent the required medical assessment on that day. 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.*)

(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.*

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)



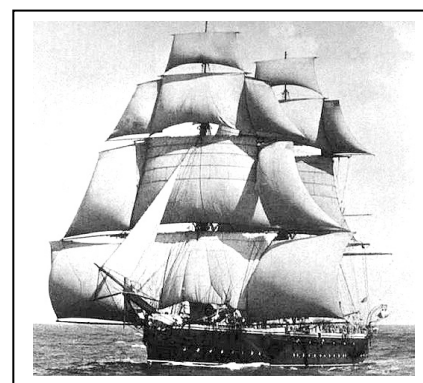
Expenses were apparently defrayed for the most part by the British (Imperial) Government and an attempt was made to ensure the number of recruits would be kept constantly at a maximum. This practice and policy was then to be continued up until the onset of hostilities some twelve years later.

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, 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 above: HMS '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 in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)

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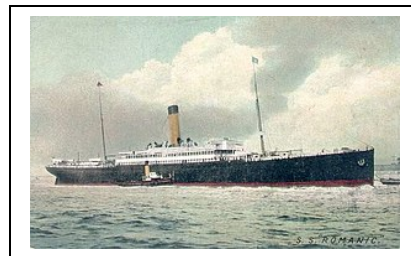
Sixty-six days after having first reported to *Briton* in St. John's, on June 18, 1916, *Seaman Recruit* Coles was apparently promoted to the rank of *seaman* while the same records suggest that it was also on this day that he was to depart from St. John's to (indirectly) cross the Atlantic.

At twenty minutes past six in the evening of June 20, having traversed the island of Newfoundland by train and then the Cabot Strait on the *SS Kyle*, the forty-three recruits of the latest draft of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) – *Seaman Cole* among that detachment – disembarked at North Sydney, Cape Breton, to undergo the short medical assessment required of all desirous of entry into Canada.

From there the draft was to take a train of the *Union Railroad* to Québec City where on June 23-24 it was to embark onto the *SS Scandinavian* for passage to the United Kingdom. At this period, *Scandinavian* was plying her commercial routes and the Newfoundland Reservists – plus the 12th Canadian Field Ambulance – were not on board because she was a troopship but because there was room available, their transit from St. John's likely booked by the *Reid Newfoundland Company*, Newfoundland Agent for the *Allan Line*.

(Right below: Launched in 1898, the vessel was first known as 'New England' before being sold to the 'White Star Line' to be re-christened 'Romanic' as seen in the image. In 1912 she was bought by the 'Allan Line' and re-named 'Scandinavian', the name she retained for the rest of her service. – the image from an old post-card via Wikipedia)

The ship arrived in the English port-city of Liverpool on July 3 whereupon the Canadians were transported to the Canadian military establishment of *Shorncliffe* in the county of Kent. Those of the Newfoundland personnel who were not immediately to join a vessel were dispersed to one of the several naval shore-based complexes around the southern English coast, there to train or perhaps simply to await a posting to one of His Majesty's ships.



In the case of *Seaman Coles*, he was ordered to report to *Victory I* in the naval city of Portsmouth where he was now to remain for some two months - although exactly what his occupations, apart from waiting, were to be during this period of wearing a cap-band emblazoned *HMS Victory* is not clear.

**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 it was only a shore-base during the Great War), Chatham, and Portsmouth for example, were land bases 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.

Thus, HMS ‘Victory’, the base to which Seaman Coles had been ordered after his arrival in the United Kingdom from Newfoundland, 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 afore-mentioned caps.

Furthermore, these establishments were at times divided into sections: ‘Victory I’ was where the seamen (as opposed to the engine-room personnel, for example, in ‘Victory II’) such as Seaman Coles were to be stationed while awaiting a posting to one of His Majesty’s ships.

(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)



On August 13, some six weeks later, Seaman Coles was dispatched to nearby Whale Island from where on a fine day Portsmouth Harbour is visible.

***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’.**



(Right above: 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)



Which is why Seaman Coles would next have worn an HMS Excellent cap-band.

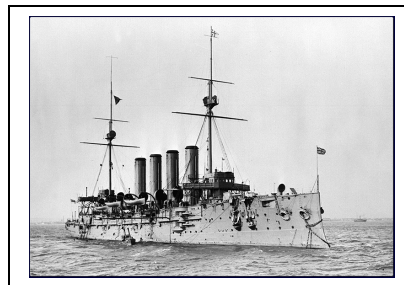
On November 9 he was placed on the books of another Royal Navy shore-based establishment: HMS President III. However, it appears that this attachment was to last only a single day, so even whether Seaman Coles was to report physically to President III is in doubt.

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On November 11 of that 1916 he returned to *Victory I* where he was to remain on the nominal roll for a year although what his duties were at the time is not clear. And it may well have been that towards the end of this period he was allowed furlough in order to return to Newfoundland, this suggested by the transfer of his name from *Vivid I* to HMS *Briton* on November 14-15 of 1917. It is also logical given the following information.

There are documents which show that Seaman Adam Coles left Newfoundland at the end of January, 1918, when he arrived in North Sydney, Nova Scotia, at three o'clock in the morning of the 27th of that month on board the SS *Kyle* from Port aux Basques.

He was next reported on the morrow as having been transferred *to duty* on board HMCS *Niobe* in Halifax. The ship, an elderly cruiser, had been ceded to the fledgling Canadian Navy in 1910 by the British. Having served with the 4th Cruiser Squadron in the early years of the *Great War* – with a hundred Newfoundland Reservists seconded to provide a part of her crew – she had thereupon been retired to become the Depot Ship of the Royal Canadian Navy in Halifax for the remainder of the conflict.

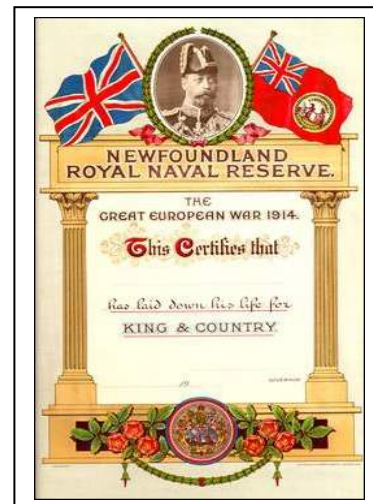


(Right above: *The photograph of HMCS 'Niobe' is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

There is little further documentation a propos Seaman Coles and his service on board *Niobe* until – Alas! – his hospitalization in Halifax, the date imprecise, at some time in mid-March.

The son of William T. (*Thomas?*) Coles and of Lily (also found as *Lilly*) Coles of the small community of Brooklyn, he was perhaps also brother to Bessie.

Seaman Coles was recorded as having died in hospital in Halifax on March 19 of 1918 – some sources have March 20 – of bronchial-pneumonia at the reported age of twenty-five years: date of birth in Brooklyn, Bonavista Bay, Newfoundland, January 19, 1892 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register) but also October 25, 1892 (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 in the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve*)

Seaman Coles 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 Adam Coles was entitled to the British War Medal (centre) for his overseas service – he apparently was not to serve in a theatre of war.



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.