



Leading Seaman Jeremiah Conway, Number 1421x, is buried in Tynemouth (Preston) Cemetery.

Having decided to *answer the call* of the naval authorities for volunteers, he thereupon relinquished his occupation of fisherman and travelled from the Placentia Bay community of St. Bride's to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on November 28 of 1914, Jeremiah Conway reported...*to duty*...on the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

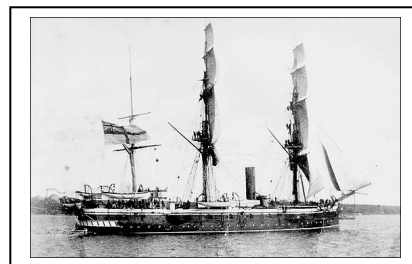


On that same November 28 he enlisted into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for a single year's war-time service\* and underwent a satisfactory medical assessment on the morrow. He also likely attested at this time, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V.



(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.*)

(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.*

*(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)*

*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.*

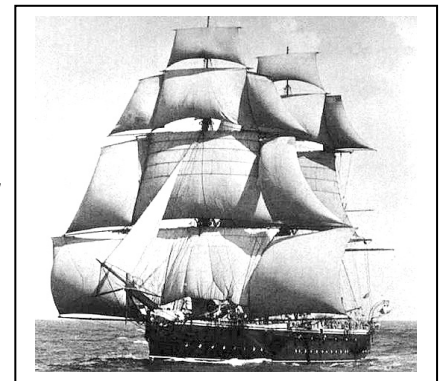
*Expenses were apparently defrayed for the most part by the British (Imperial) Government and an attempt was made to ensure the number of recruits would be kept constantly at a maximum. This practice and policy was then to be continued up until the onset of hostilities some twelve years later.*

*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.*



*(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)*

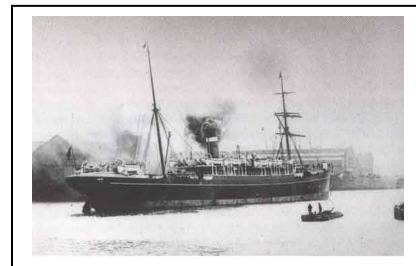
*An elderly vessel, HMS Calypso, having become surplus to the Admiralty's needs, had been provided to the Dominion of Newfoundland by the Royal Navy in 1902 for training purposes. After some debate it was eventually decided that she would be permanently moored in the harbour of the capital, her superstructure 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)*

*(continued)*

Nineteen days\* after having first reported to *Calypso* in St. John's, on December 17 – at this point having been promoted from the rank of *Seaman Recruit* – the now-Seaman Conway was one of a draft of one-hundred fifty-three Naval volunteers to board the steamship *Mongolian* in St. John's Harbour for passage across the Atlantic to the United Kingdom. The ship sailed for the Scottish port-city of Glasgow at four o'clock on that same afternoon.



(Right above: *Built in 1891 for use by the 'Allan Line' for the transport of emigrants from Europe to North America, 'Mongolian' was a slow vessel with a speed of just twelve knots and was, by 1914, becoming obsolescent. She was nevertheless to be bought in 1914 for use by the Admiralty and remained in service until July 21 of 1918 when she was torpedoed and sunk by U-boat 70 with a loss of thirty-five lives. – photograph from the British Home Child Group International web-site)*

*\*It appears that in many cases, even if the recruit in question had not already previously been with the Royal Naval Reserve, the required twenty-eight day training period, all or partially, was waived by 'Royal Proclamation'.*

As seen above, Glasgow was to be Seaman Conway's draft's destination. Upon disembarkation the Naval Reserve personnel would thereupon have been either posted directly to a ship or ordered to undergo further training at one of various Royal Navy establishments – these for the most part in England.

In the case of Seaman Conway, the destination was to be HMS *Excellent*, the Royal Navy Gunnery School and facilities just off-shore from the south-coast naval port-city of Portsmouth at almost the other end of the country.

*\*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 adjacent: *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 Conway would soon have been wearing an HMS *Excellent* cap-band.

After several weeks of learning how the Royal Navy's armaments worked, Seaman Conway was then placed on the books of the nearby HMS *Victory I* on January 29 although for exactly how long - or even if he was to remain in Portsmouth - appears not to have been recorded - but likely some two weeks.

*HMS 'Victory', like most of the so-called stone-frigates (naval establishments on shore), was three entities: it was a training establishment originally, and also a holding-barracks for seamen not only in training but awaiting a posting to one of His Majesty's ships, its facilities initially set in the naval city and port of Portsmouth\*; thirdly, it was also the ship to which the majority of the land-based personnel would have been, at least officially and bureaucratically - if not physically - attached\*\*.*

*At Portsmouth this vessel was HMS 'Victory', the warship from which Admiral Nelson had directed the Battle of Trafalgar - although her illustrious history is not limited to that one single incident.*

*\*The large influx of personnel due to the War necessitated further Divisions and functions being transferred to other areas of the United Kingdom.*

*(Right: HMS 'Victory' in dry dock in the southern English port-city of Portsmouth where she has been for a century - photograph from Wikipedia)*

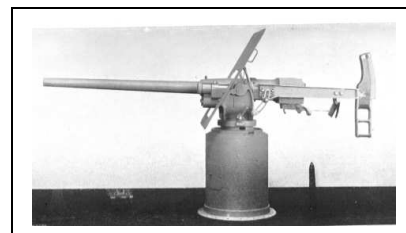


*\*\*Naval discipline differed in some ways from civil and even Army law, and those in naval uniform, even though based on land and perhaps never to go to sea, had to be on the books of a real ship for that discipline to be applied. Thus a normally small, obsolescent and obscure vessel - 'Victory' was the exception - was used for this purely bureaucratic purpose.*

As seen above, Seaman Conway was posted to *Victory I*, one of the several Divisions of *Victory*, each specializing in some way from the others - *Victory II*, for example, trained stokers and other engine-room personnel. *Victory I* was dedicated to the training of seamen or, if they were already trained as was the case of Seaman Conway, it was, as also seen above, a holding-barracks where he was now to stay for the above-mentioned two weeks...perhaps (but *officially* until February 14).

On that date he was transferred - at least on paper - to *Victory II* from where he was to join *Elsie*.

*Elsie* was a trawler of less than two-hundred tons built in 1896 which before the War had worked out of the east-coast fishing-port and town of Hull. She had been converted for war-time service, armed with a single six-pounder quick-firing gun and put to work as a mine-sweeper in January of 1915. She would survive the conflict.



(Preceding page: A *Quick-Firing Hotchkiss six-pounder gun* such as would had been mounted on the fore-deck of the trawler 'Elsie' – from Wikipedia)

(Right: Another hired trawler, 'Miura', of two-hundred fifty tons built in 1911 is seen here on duty – her gun on the fore-deck - in the North Sea. She was to go into war-time service in February of 1915 and would be lost some six months later to a mine. – photograph from the *wrecksite.eu* web-site via Google)



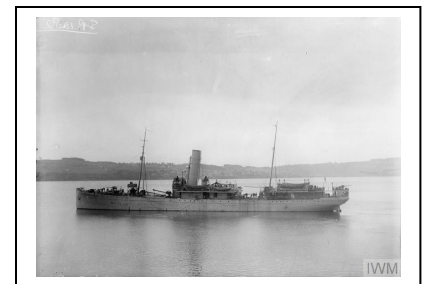
(Right: Minelaying from a German surface vessel during the Great War: these were for the most part contact mines. – from the *NavWeaps* web-site)

When it was that Seaman Conway was to set foot on the deck of *Elsie* has not been recorded but at most it was to be for only eight days as he was subsequently attached on February 23-24 of 1915 to another ship, *HMS Stephen Furness*, and on this occasion his tenure was to be of a longer duration, officially from February 24 until April 22 of the same year.



A former passenger ship, the *Stephen Furness* of some 1700 tons had been converted in the year 1914 in order to serve as a squadron supply ship which she did from December of that 1914 until March of 1916.

She was then transformed into an armed boarding cruiser armed with two 4.7-inch naval guns, re-named as *Royal Scot*, and worked with the 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron inspecting the cargoes of commercial merchant vessels.



She was subsequently torpedoed and sunk by *U-boat 64* near *Belfast Lough* on December 13 of 1917 with a loss of one-hundred one lives.

(Right above: The image of the armed boarding cruiser *HMS 'Royal Scot'* (formerly 'Stephen Furness') is from 'The Vimy Foundation' web-site.)

Seaman Conway was officially – at least on paper – to return to service at *HMS Victory I* on April 23 of that same year, 1915, there to remain until May 26 – having been promoted to the rank of Leading Seaman on the day prior to that, May 25.

He was thereupon shunted back to the *HMS Excellent*, the Gunnery School on Whale Island, and served there for just more than five weeks before returning to *Victory I* where he then remained until August 2.

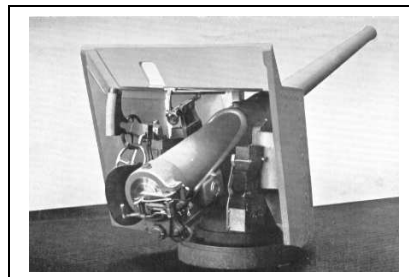
There was now another ship awaiting Leading Seaman Conway, the armed merchant cruiser *HMS Carmania*, before the *Great War* one of the largest of the *Cunard Line's* trans-Atlantic passenger ships. Armed with eight 4.7-inch naval guns, she went into service only



four days after the British *Declaration of War* and took part in the sinking of the German armed merchant cruiser *Cap Trafalgar*, on September 14 of that year.

(Right below: *An example of the naval gun with which HMS 'Carmania' had been equipped prior to sailing on her war-time duties. – from Wikipedia*)

The months following had been shared among time spent at Gibraltar, patrolling the waters between Portugal and the Canary islands, and some time based in the eastern Mediterranean in the area of the Greek island of Lemnos. On June 12 of 1915 she sailed into the Royal Navy anchorage at Plymouth-Devonport on the south coast of England.



She did not venture to sea again until August 3, 1915, when the following entry was made into the vessel's log-book: *9.00pm: J. Conway (Leading Seaman) R.N.R: joined ship from HMS Victory.*

Sixty-four hours later, *Carmania*, at...12.45pm: *Cleared dock gates and proceeded down-stream to Plymouth Sound.*

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



From that time until the beginning of October *HMS Carmania* was to be on patrol having firstly spent time at the British base of Gibraltar sited on the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea. These duties took her mainly to the area between the Spanish-owned Canary Islands and the Portuguese archipelago of Madeira, off the coast of Morocco.



(Right above: *The British Crown Colony of Gibraltar in pre-Great War days: The Spanish mainland is in the background beyond the harbour and Royal Navy dockyard. – from a vintage postcard*)

Having returned to the Royal Navy harbour of Plymouth-Devonport by October 3, Leading Seaman Conway's vessel was next to make the Atlantic crossing from there to Halifax, Nova Scotia. He was back at Plymouth in early November, there to finish his service with *Carmania* on the 11<sup>th</sup> when he found himself transferred for five weeks and three days to another shore-based British naval establishment, that of *HMS Pembroke* in the town of Chatham some thirty kilometres to the east of London.

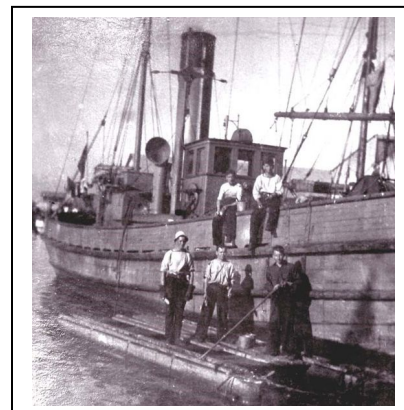


(Right above: *Some of the still-impressive buildings of the large Royal Navy complex which was the HMS 'Pembroke' naval establishment at Chatham for just less than one hundred years. Today it has been transformed into a university campus. – photograph from 2010*)

On December 21 of that 1915, Leading Seaman Conway was ordered attached to HMS *Island Queen*, another trawler\* which had been during the first month of the Great War to serve with the Royal Navy. Built in 1911 and weighing some two-hundred tons, she, like HMT *Elsie* of an earlier page, had been equipped with a six-pounder gun and was to be engaged in mine-sweeping.

*\*During the War, 1456 such vessels were requisitioned from ports around the British Isles and even elsewhere, of which two-hundred sixty-four were to be lost.*

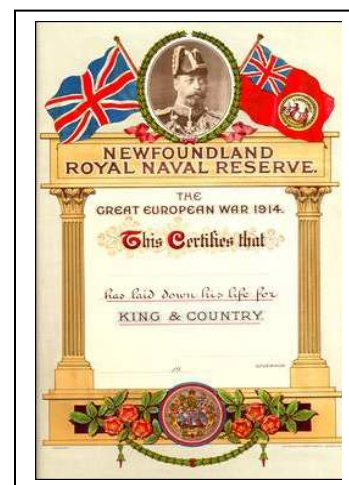
Before the conflict the trawler and her crew had been working out of the fishing-port of North Shields on the River Tyne in north-eastern England. After her secondment – with her crew – by the Admiralty, she was then to perform her war-time duties in the North Sea sailing out of the same harbour. Thus North Shields was where Leading Seaman Conway was to join his ship, His Majesty's Trawler *Island Prince* on which he was to serve for the succeeding sixteen months.



The circumstances of Leading Seaman Conway's death are far from clear: firstly, he is identified in the Royal Navy casualty records as Joseph Conway and his death is attributed to illness; in his scant personal service record his demise is documented as...*D.D. (Discharged Dead) Drowned Accidentally.*

There appears to be no record of the whereabouts of HMT *Island Prince* or of her activities on that date, April 10, 1917.

(Right above: *The photograph showing crew-members re-fitting their unidentified trawler for mine-sweeping duties is from the 'Pinterest' web-site to which it was donated by Dr. David Beatty and Leslie Goodwin.*)



(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 son of Edward Conway, fisherman, deceased of...*old age*...on March 25, 1913, and of Catherine Conway (née *Foley\**, deceased on March 26, 1886), of St. Bride's, Placentia Bay, he was also brother to a single brother, Richard, whom he was to name as his next-of-kin on his enlistment papers.

Leading Seaman Conway was recorded as having died as reported above, on April 10, 1917, this from a copy from Royal Navy records (but recorded as April 12, 1917, in the Newfoundland Death Register, and also as April 16 of that same year by the *Virtual War Memorial, Veterans' Affairs, Canada*) at the *reported* age of thirty years: month and year of birth in St. Bride's, Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, February of 1886 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register), and his baptism on February 9, also 1886.

(continued)



**Leading Seaman Conway 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 Jeremiah Conway was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).**



**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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 22, 2023.**