



Seaman James Patrick Curran, Number 1604x, lies in Ramsgate and St. Lawrence Cemetery in the English County of Kent: Grave reference EA. 242 (R.C.).

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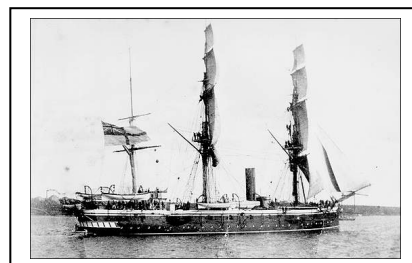
Having decided to *answer the call* of the naval authorities for volunteers and having relinquished his occupation as a fisherman, he thereupon travelled from the community of Ferryland on the south-eastern region of the Avalon Peninsula to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland. There, on January 26 of 1915, James Patrick Curran reported...*to duty*...on the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that same January 26 he enlisted for the first time into the Royal Naval Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for a single year* and also underwent a satisfactory 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.

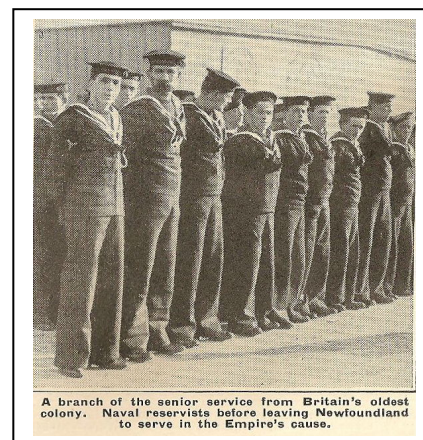
Just fewer than four-hundred men were sought to enroll as seamen – apparently automatically at the rank of Able Seaman - and to present themselves annually in St. John’s for five years in order to train for a period of twenty-eight days per annum. Allowed to report at a time of their own choosing, it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



(Right above: 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)

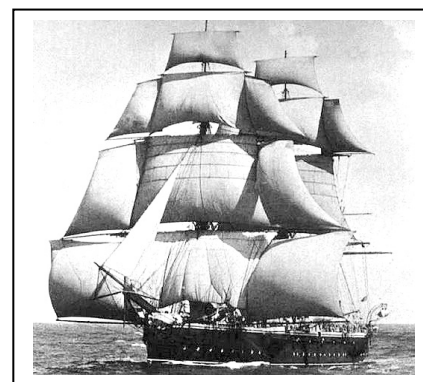
Expenses were apparently defrayed for the most part by the British (Imperial) Government and an attempt was made to ensure the number of recruits would be kept constantly at a maximum. This practice and policy was then to be continued up until the onset of hostilities some twelve years later.

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.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *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)*

Apparently only a mere nine days* after having first reported to *Calypso* in St. John's, on February 4 Seaman Curran was promoted from the rank of Seaman Recruit to that of Seaman; thereupon, on the same February 4 of that 1915, the records suggest that he was to depart from St. John's to cross the Atlantic.

**It appears that in many cases, even if the recruit in question had not already previously been with the Royal Naval Reserve, the compulsory twenty-eight day training period was oft-times waived.*

On that date, the detachment of volunteers for the Army that upon its arrival at Edinburgh Castle was to become 'C' Company of the Newfoundland contingent in the United Kingdom, boarded the tender *Neptune* in St. John's Harbour for the short journey down the coast to Bay Bulls. There the ocean-going vessel *Dominion* awaited to carry it across the Atlantic and it might be assumed that the Naval Reservists were to be a part of that contingent.



(Right above: *The photograph of personnel of 'C' Company on board the 'Neptune' on the way to the harbour at Bay Bulls is from the Provincial Archives.*)

The available sources do not, however, record any Newfoundland naval reservists taking passage on *Dominion*. In fact, *Calypso's* drill register of the time records that the draft personnel was to leave St. John's on board the *Allan Line* vessel, the *SS Mongolian*, on February 17 – although the ship's captain has recorded (see below) that it was the 18th.

The situation seems to have been even a bit more complicated than that: Days before, according to the local newspapers, on that February 4-5, *Mongolian* had left St. John's to attempt to force a passage through the heavy ice surrounding the entrance to St. John's and extending well offshore. It was to no avail and after three days of futile effort the ship returned to port.

In re-entering St. John's Harbour, however, the vessel struck a rock and, after inspection, it was decided necessary to do emergency repairs in the local dock. In the meantime some of the vessel's passengers were to take the train across the island so as to catch another ship in Halifax.

On or about February 23, the repairs having been completed, *Mongolian* departed Newfoundland once again, only to be immediately met with heavy seas which eventually were to at least partially undo much of the temporary work which had been completed to the ship only days before.

The following is an adaption of a letter written by *Mongolian's* captain after his ship had reached the safety of the harbour of Halifax on February 25. It was addressed to Lieutenant-Commander McDermott of *HMS Calypso* who saw fit to forward it to the Office of the Colonial Secretary – whence it made its way to the local press.

Dear Sir:-

It is but just that I submit the following to your notice.

As you are aware, the ship under my command left St. John's 18th February with 200 R.N.R. ratings from your ship under the command of Captain Alan Goodridge. On their arrival on board 'Mongolian' Captain Goodridge at once established regular discipline and routine.

Shortly after leaving port rough and foggy weather was encountered and as ship proceeded East this weather became worse each day. On 22nd and 23rd a heavy gale raged from North-East with very high seas, causing the ship to labour considerably. On the latter date trouble arose through the giving-out of temporary repairs done in St. John's. Considerable water was found making its way into the fore end of the ship. After consultation I decided to return here to Halifax.

I requested Captain Goodridge with ratings under his command to assist me in every way consistent with requirements. It is needless to say such help was given in the most energetic and cheerful manner by way of preparing for any emergency. Manning deck pumps (which were kept going day and night until arrival into port). Also a number of men were detailed to assist in the engine room and stokehold. (Chief Engineer Brown of this ship desires me to specially mention the valuable assistance of these men.

For my part I cannot speak too highly of Captain Goodridge. His cheerful and composed manner throughout went far to inspire confidence not only in the men under his command but also the passengers entrusted to my care.

I would request, Sir, that you would be good enough to forward to His Excellency the Governor my appreciation for the assistance so ably rendered by him. I would also ask you to place on record my high opinion of Petty Officer George Gill and Armourer Luxon.

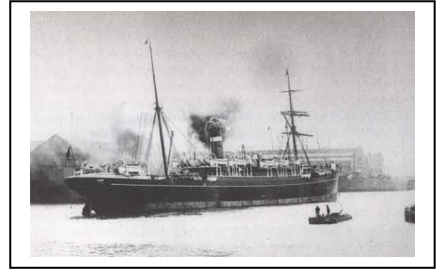
The entire staff of my ship join with me in thanking the men of the Newfoundland Reserve whose conduct throughout was most exemplary and helpful in every way.

I may say that almost immediately upon arrival here the men were transferred to the SS 'Scandinavian' and sailed about 9 p.m..

J.W. Hatherly
Master S.S. Mongolian

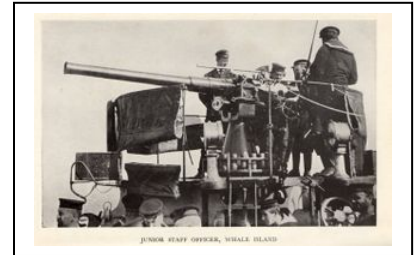
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(Right: The SS 'Mongolian' was an elderly vessel constructed in 1891. Built for the Allan Line Company she was to have served as a troopship during the Boer War before being bought by the British Admiralty, again for war service, in 1914 or 1915. She was not to survive the conflict: on July 21 of 1918 she was torpedoed and sunk by U-boat 70 with a loss of thirty-five lives. – The photograph of Mongolian is from the British Home Child Group International web-site.)



Once having disembarked from *Scandinavian* - on which they had journeyed from Halifax (see previous page) - in the United Kingdom in early March, any naval personnel would 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 Curran, the destination was to be the Royal Navy's Gunnery School, HMS *Excellent*, on *Whale Island* facing the entrance to the harbour of Portsmouth on England's south coast.

***HMS 'Excellent' was 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: Recruits drill on a naval gun on Whale Island – from Wikipedia)

And as those 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.

It was a move which was to complicate things administratively.

Naval discipline being distinct in some ways from the laws that governed other parties such as the Army and civilians, sailors had to be on the books of a serving naval vessel to be legally subject to naval law and order, even when these sailors were serving on land at a 'stone-frigate', as these land-based facilities came to be known.

Thus the use of elderly and obsolescent vessels that plied the waters adjacent to the many naval land establishments were in theory the home ships of the tens, hundreds, even thousands of men who laboured ashore in naval uniform – and who often were never to set foot on the ship in question.

(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 Curran would have worn an HMS 'Excellent' cap-band.

On April 17 of 1915, having concluded his gunnery training at HMS *Excellent*, Seaman-Gunner Curran was recorded as attached to the mercantile ship *Hector* (later HMS *Hector*). However, this ship was then to serve in the *Dardanelles* (also known as *Gallipoli*) *Campaign* at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea; and while certain Newfoundland sailors were to serve there, the places and dates of HMS *Hector's* itinerary* render it highly unlikely that Seaman-Gunner Curran was ever one of that number.

**On May 12 of 1915 'Hector', a merchant ship of some forty-six hundred tons, was requisitioned to act as a Fleet Messenger and later Kite Balloon ship, and was commissioned as HMS 'Hector'. By the end of June the ship was in Greek waters in and about the island of Lemnos (Limnos) and a month later was operating just off the coast of the Turkish Gallipoli Peninsula. There she remained until mid-October – thus unless Seaman-Gunner Curran was to take another ship back to the United Kingdom at some time before August, an unlikely occurrence, he would not have served on HMS 'Hector'.*

This may suggest that after HMS *Excellent* he was to serve on His Majesty's Drifter *Arcady* – the name found in brackets in his file next to the name of *Hector* - for some four months. This was, of course, the vessel on which he was to serve for six weeks later on during that same year.



If service on *Arcady* were to be the case, then after his time at HMS *Excellent* Seaman-Gunner Curran would have travelled across country to HMS *Ceto*, the small naval base at the coastal town of Ramsgate.

Prior to the *Great War*, Ramsgate had been a popular seaside destination and it had also been a thriving fishing centre, both of which had suffered hugely because of German U-boat activity, mine-laying and, later, bombing raids. It was in order to counter the submarines and mines that the Admiralty had created the *Dover Patrol* for which it was to requisition a number of fishing-boats, drifters and tugs, arm them, and place Navy personnel on board.

(Right above: *Drifters and other small vessels lined up at the quay-side of Ramsgate Harbour during the early days of the Great War – from the Imperial War Museum web-site...livesofthefirstworldwar.iwm.org.uk*)

Thus HMS *Ceto* was to come into being at Ramsgate, a base where Seaman-Gunner Curran would be...*taken on strength*...on April 18 of 1915.

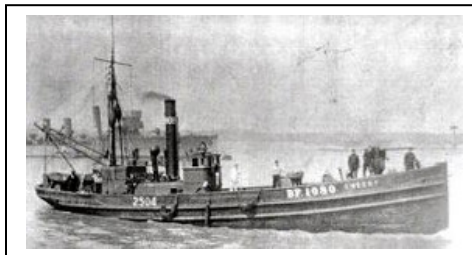
At some point after having reported to HMS *Ceto*, Seaman Curran would have changed cap-bands once more when he became a crew-member of the aforementioned drifter, HMS *Arcady*, a vessel at times engaged in the search for, and the destruction of, enemy mines.



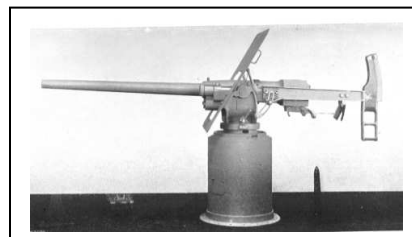
(Right: *Minelaying from a German surface vessel during the War: these were for the most part contact mines. U-boats were also used for this purpose – from NavWeaps web-site)*

There was nothing particularly conspicuous about *Arcady*. Perhaps constructed mainly of wood, she was just another hired drifter, Admiralty Number A, 1289. She had been built in 1910, weighed some eighty-five tons and had been registered as LT. 741. in the fishing town of Lowestoft further up the coast. No longer simply a fishing-boat, she was to carry armament comprising a single six-pounder gun.

(Right: *The Royal Navy Drifter ‘Cheery’ of the same class as ‘Arcady’ – both of which were to survive the conflict - the photograph showing a small gun mounted on her fore-deck – photograph from Wikipedia)*



(Right below: *A Quick-Firing Hotchkiss six-pounder gun such as would have been mounted on the fore-deck of the trawler Arcady – from Wikipedia)*



On August 22-23 of that year of 1915, Seaman-Gunner Curran was transferred to *Pembroke*, another Royal Navy land base, training establishment and barracks in the town of Chatham in the same county of Kent as was to be found Ramsgate.

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



He was to remain at *Pembroke* – in fact at *Pembroke I*, the Division for the training and holding of seaman – for only a week and two days before being transferred – or perhaps returned – to HMS *Ceto* at Ramsgate and to *Arcady*.

There appears to be no record of the number of patrols or actions in which the ship and Seaman-Gunner Curran were to be involved, or then if there were any circumstances particular to that Thursday, October 14, 1915, events which may have contributed to the accident. In fact, it appears that the vessel was in the dock at Ramsgate at the time.

The son of Patrick Curran, fisherman, and of Bridget Curran (née *Shea**, deceased on October 2 of 1897) of Riverhead, St. John’s, before Ferryland, he was also half-brother to Martin, Mary-Ellen, Maggie and to Bridie.

***The couple had married in St. John’s on November 28, 1891. After his wife Bridget’s passing, Patrick Curran was to marry again, to Mary Boland on November 19 of 1898.**



(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 James Patrick Curran died on October 14, 1915, accidentally drowning in Ramsgate Dock, at the *reported* age of twenty-three years: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, September 5 of 1892 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register and confirmed by his enlistment papers).

Seaman Curran 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 James Patrick Curran was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, 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.

