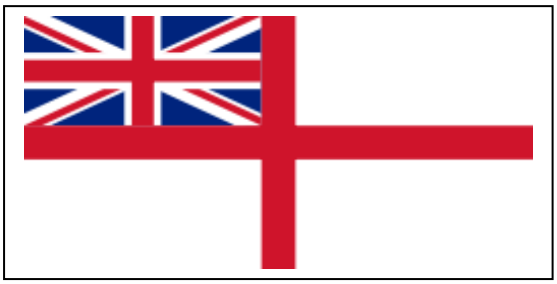
Having relinquished his occupation, likely as a fisherman, and having travelled from the area of Mortier Bay on the Burin Peninsula to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on September 3 of 1915 Samuel Mayo Hooper reported…*to duty*…at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that same September day of 1915, he enlisted for the first time into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to for a single year's war-time service*…and underwent the required medical assessment on the morrow. He also most likely was to attest at this time, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V.

(Preceding page: *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.

(continued)

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.

(Right below: *HMS 'Calypso' is seen here in full sail. The vessel was to be re-commissioned 'HMS Briton' in 1916 when a new 'Calypso', a modern cruiser, was launched by the Royal Navy*. – The Royal Navy photograph dated 1898 is by courtesy of the *Admiralty House Museum*)

Only twenty-two days* after having been…*taken on strength*…on '*Calypso'*, his sparse Service Records document that it was on September 25, having by that time been promoted from the rank of *Seaman Recruit*, that the now-Seaman Hooper was on his way to the United Kingdom.

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 oft-times waived.

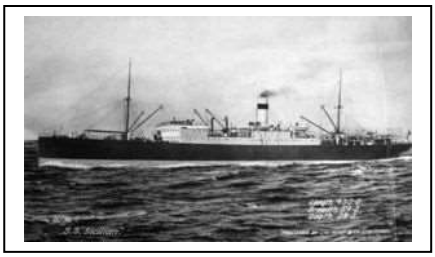
(Right: *Naval reservists from Newfoundland at some time during the early days of the Great War, before their departure for the United Kingdom* - from *The War Illustrated*)

The date of departure may in fact have been September 23, the day after an *entertainment* had been held for *a large number of reservists* by the local Board of Trade. The Naval personnel would then have crossed the island by train to embark onto the SS *Kyle* for passage on the night of September 24-25 from Port aux Basques to North Sydney, to arrive there at ten minutes past five in the morning.

The *Kyle*'s passenger manifesto records a contingent on one-hundred forty-two reservists – Seaman *Samuel M. Hooper* among that number - then undertaking the onward journey at twenty past seven a.m. after a medical inspection, via Halifax to Québec on the *Intercontinental Railway* where the draft boarded ship for the trans-Atlantic passage.

The *Discharge Register Royal Naval Reserve* appears adamant that the draft was now to board the SS *Sicilian* in Québec but there appears to be no further information in this regard available *a propos* the Newfoundland contingent*.

(Right below: *The image, likely in peace-time, of the 'Allan Line' ship 'Sicilian' is from the Wikipedia web-site*.)



While fairly accurate records have been kept for troop-transports, 'Sicilian' was not to be requisitioned as such and thus continued her commercial runs between Montréal, Québec and the United Kingdom. Any precise records of her whereabouts and doings during the war-time period are rare indeed – any of late September, 1915, are even more elusive.

Having arrived in the United Kingdom towards the end of the first week of that October of 1915, the Naval Reserve personnel would thereupon have been either posted directly to a ship or ordered to undergo further training – or to simply await a posting to one of His Majesty's ships - at one of various Royal Navy establishments – these for the most part operating around the coast of England.

In the case of Seaman Hooper, the destination was to be HMS *Pembroke I.*

HMS *Pembroke was the Royal Navy establishment at Chatham on the River Medway, itself a tributary of the better-known River Thames, in the county of Kent. Not only was it a barracks – it operated from 1878 until 1983 – but it was the name given to a number of training establishments, mostly not far-removed from Chatham, which were numbered according to the purpose of the training – or otherwise - involved.**

***Pembroke I* was the training station and holding-barracks for regular seamen and it was likely, as seen above, *Pembroke I* to which Seaman Hooper was to be attached.**

There was also a series of ships named 'Pembroke', the last several of which were used as depot ships and for harbour service at Chatham. This is the 'HMS Pembroke' found on the cap-bands of the sailors who served there perhaps in their thousands - but who were never to set eyes on the actual ship in question.

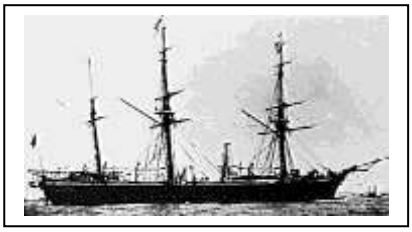
Naval discipline being distinct in some ways from the laws that governed other parties such as the Army and civilians, sailors had to be on the books of a serving naval vessel to be legally subject to naval law and order, even when these sailors were serving on land.

Thus the elderly and obsolescent vessels that plied the waters adjacent to the many naval land establishments – and known as stone frigates – were in theory the home ships of the tens, hundreds, thousands of men who laboured ashore.

Which is why Seaman Hooper would have worn an HMS 'Pembroke' cap-band.

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

His Service Records show that on November 11 of 1915 Seaman Hooper was transferred, at least officially, to service with HMS *Cormorant* where he was to remain for one-hundred thirty-nine days.



There were at the time two hired fishing-vessels on the Royal Navy's books named *'Cormorant'* but they were also numbered: *'Cormorant III'* and *'Cormorant IV'*, the enumeration made to avoid any problems of identification. But there was a third vessel, the un-numbered *'Cormorant'*, the harbour-service and base-ship stationed at the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea, at Gibraltar.

Seaman Hooper's *Cormorant* not being numbered, this is surely the one on which he was to serve during that winter of 1915-1916…except that all the other shore-based facilities – barracks, armouries, dock-yards etc. – were also a part of HMS *Cormorant*, and thus he may never have set foot on the ship itself.

(Right above: *The image of HMS 'Cormorant' is from Wikipedia. She was one of five such vessels built for the Royal Navy and commissioned in and about 1878 for use in the surveillance of Britain's numerous trade routes. Having been stationed as far afield as Australia, the Pacific and Canada's west coast, in 1889 she was ordered to Gibraltar to play several roles for sixty years, until 1949 when ultimately scrapped.*)

There appears to be no record of Seaman Samuel Mayo Hooper's duties on board *'Cormorant'* – or elsewhere - at Gibraltar, and after those twenty weeks at HMS *Cormorant* he was back – or soon to be back - in England, on the nominal roll of another Royal Navy shore-based establishment, *President III*.

(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)

Apart from functioning as a training-station for the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve and as a holding-barracks, HMS *President* was a major accounting base for the Royal Navy; by the end of the Great War there were six different Accounting Divisions with offices not only in London – where *President* as a training-ship – a real ship - had originated in 1862 – but in several other venues in southern England.

(Right above: *The sloop HMS 'Buzzard', seen here on the Thames in 19106, was to become the headquarters-ship of HMS 'President' – and therefore also adopted the name – in 1911, to serve as such until 1918.* – photograph from Wikipedia)

But as it had been with Seaman Hooper at Gibraltar, *where* he was to work and *what* that work exactly was to be, is not found among his papers.

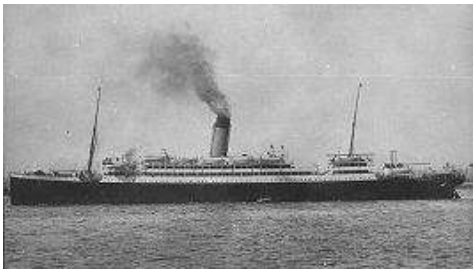
In fact, it appears that after only two months, on June 8 he was to be demobilized – but again, the circumstances have not been given unto us…except to record that, some four months later again, on October 12 of that 1916, he was re-mobilized and sent to report back to HMS *Pembroke* at Chatham. This is unless during this period he was allowed a period of furlough back to Newfoundland, although the author has yet to find any evidence for it.

If not, it must have been during the period that now followed Seaman Hooper's return to service that he was deemed worthy of that month's leave back in Newfoundland. When the details of passage had been decided, the ship on which he was to journey was to be an armed merchant cruiser, HMS *Laurentic.*

If he had just returned from the other side of the Atlantic, then he was likely to have been ordered attached to serve as a crew member on that ill-fated vessel.

In either case, Seaman Hooper was to travel in the company of a number of other Newfoundland naval reservists who having by this time also having served long enough to merit some furlough at home, were to travel – likely to Halifax or Québec – on the ship.

The ship was to sail from Birkenhead, a port adjacent to Liverpool, on that January 23 with a reported four-hundred seventy-five* persons on board as well as some forty tons of gold with which to buy munitions in North America.



(Right: *The photograph of 'Laurentic', likely seen here in peace-time as no guns are visible on her decks, is from the Naval-History.net web-site*)

While it is recorded that 'Laurentic' was carrying no passengers or troops, it should be remembered that some of those on board were returning home for leave or for repatriation.

While passing by the north-west coast of Ireland on the morning of January 25, the ship unexpectedly put into the small town of Buncrana in Lough (pronounced as in *Loch Ness*) Swilly to put ashore several sick crew-members. At five o'clock on that same afternoon *Laurentic* was under way again.

She then passed through the protective boom at the entrance to Lough Swilly and gathered speed – it was apparently for her speed that she had been chosen to carry the gold as she could out-run most ships and any U-boat. She was barely three kilometres from the coast when she struck two German mines in quick succession and rapidly began to sink; nor after the second explosion was there any power and thus no distress signal could be sent.

(Preceding page and right: *The Memorial to those who perished on that January 25 of 1916 during the sinking of HMS 'Laurentic'; and the churchyard of St. Mura of the Church of Ireland at Upper Fahan, Ireland, wherein stands the aforesaid Memorial and where many of the dead lie to this day* – photographs from 2011)

There was scarcely time to lower the life-boats although apparently all on board *Laurentic*, apart from perhaps some engine-room personnel who were already dead, were able to board them. It was to do them little good.

A snow-storm was blowing and most of the men were not clothed to resist it. Any help had to travel the length of the Lough and then through open seas to reach them. Apparently the nearest land could only be reached in the teeth of the gale that was blowing, a wind reckoned to be at minus twelve degrees, and the boats were filling with water.

And those that eventually managed to land found themselves isolated on the rocky, barren, un-inhabited coast of Donegal.

Little wonder, perhaps, that of the four-hundred seventy-five on board *Laurentic*, three-hundred fifty-four were to die.

(Right: *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 James Hooper, fisherman, and of Frances Jane (née *Blank* (sic)) of Rock Harbour before Mortier Bay (Creston) in the District of Burin, Newfoundland, he was also youngest brother to Caroline, Selina, Elvina, John-Charles, Mary and to Stephen.

Seaman Samuel Mayo Hooper was recorded as having died in the…*sinking of HMS Laurentic*…on January 25 of 1917 at the age of twenty years: date of birth at Mortier Bay (today *Marystown*), Newfoundland, August 3, 1897 (this date from only his enlistment papers).

Seaman Hooper 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 Samuel Mayo Hooper was entitled to the British War Medal (left) 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 21, 2023.