



Seaman William King, Number 2181x, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on a bronze beneath the Caribou at the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

Having decided to *answer the call* of the naval authorities for volunteers William King relinquished his work as a fisherman working out of or near to the not-distant Conception Bay community of Brigus, and travelled to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on November 5 of 1914, he reported...*to duty*\*...on board the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in the harbour (see below) and was...*taken on strength*.

On that same November 5 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 underwent a satisfactory medical assessment. 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)**

(Right: 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)



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: 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.

Following just some two weeks of training\* in St. John's, Seaman King, one of a draft of one-hundred forty-nine naval reservists, embarked on November 18-19 onto the *Allan Line* ocean-liner *Carthaginian* which was apparently returning on its commercial route from Philadelphia(?) to Glasgow and thereupon took the draft on board. She sailed at nine o'clock in the evening of the 19<sup>th</sup>, its reservist passengers unmentioned in the local newspapers.



(Right above: A relatively elderly vessel, 'Carthaginian' had been launched in October of 1884. She apparently remained un-requisitioned as a troop transport during the conflict although this did not prevent her from being sunk by a mine laid by a U-boat off the Irish coast on June 14 of 1917 – happily without any loss of life it may be added. – the un-dated photograph of *Carthaginian* entering St. John's harbour has been donated to the *Maritime History Archive* web-site by Captain Harry Stone.)

(continued)

*\*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.*

Once having disembarked in the United Kingdom it appears that while some few of the men were posted directly to a ship, the majority was ordered directly to undergo further training at various Royal Navy establishments and thus, likely having journeyed by train, reported to these bases on or about November 28-29.

From the available documents it appears that Seaman King was one of those to be directly attached to a vessel. Thus on the day of his disembarkation he had not far to go: the SS *Bayano* was completing her conversion for war-time purposes and was also to be stationed there in Glasgow.

*Bayano* was a new ship, a smallish six-thousand ton passenger and cargo (particularly, apparently, bananas) vessel, built in 1913, and which was to be requisitioned during the early period of the *Great War* for service as an Armed Merchant Cruiser. To this end *Bayano* was armed with two six-inch guns – six-inches is the calibre – before being ordered into service on November 21 of 1914.

*Bayano* was to be attached to the 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron, also known as the *Northern Patrol*, a force based at Scapa Flow – although often out of Liverpool - and originally comprising out-of-date warships which, by that January of 1915, had been replaced by requisitioned ocean-going passenger-cargo ships carrying a few guns as old or as new as the ships on which they were mounted.



(Right above: *A six-inch gun such as those mounted on ‘Bayano’, although this one has been fitted for coastal defence – photograph from 2010(?) and taken at the Royal Artillery Museum at Woolwich*)

The ships of the 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron were not spoiling – and certainly not prepared - for a fight. Their job was to form a part of the naval blockade designed to prevent ships carrying goods to Germany from reaching their destination; to accomplish this these vessels had to patrol the area of stormy waters encompassed by Ireland, northern Scotland and Iceland, a thankless job at the best of times: during the tempestuous winter months, even worse.

Two of the first losses during the *Great War* among those Armed Merchant Cruisers were to be vessels of the 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron: *Viknor* was lost on January 13, 1915, taking with her the entire crew of three-hundred two, including twenty-five Newfoundland sailors; only three weeks later *Clan McNaughton* sank and a comparable number or crewmen died, of which twenty-two Newfoundlanders.



*Bayano* was to be the next.

*(Preceding page: HMS 'Bayano' is here seen clad in her war-time camouflage dress and with one of those six-inch guns prominent in a forward position. The caption also claims the year to be a rather doubtful 1913 – it cites her as 'coming into service' which, as seen above, was not until 1914. – photograph from Wikipedia)*

The following is an account of the sinking of HMS *Bayano* and is adapted from a report found on the *Scottish Shipwrecks* web-site:

*On 25th February, 1915 the submarine U-27\* left Emden in the early morning. It was to be a sortie that would culminate in an attack on HMS Bayano in the Firth of Clyde two weeks later. The submarine passed north around Orkney on February 28, turned south west into the North Atlantic, then west of the Outer Hebrides to arrive in its patrol area in the North Channel on March 3. For the next week the U-boat roamed the area with no success until the morning of March 11 in the Firth of Clyde.*

*At that moment Bayano was returning to sea to her patrol duties under the command of Captain Carr with a crew of nearly two hundred and fifty. At 4:50am she was a few miles north of Corsewall Point, Galloway. The night was clear but overcast and dark and the sea calm. Two thirds of the crew were asleep, the third watch being in charge of the vessel steaming through the night.*

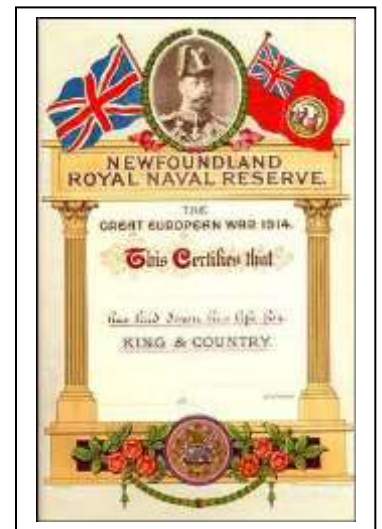
*The U-boat Captain later stated that through the periscope he saw a large commercial steamship steaming out of the Firth with lights dimmed. He was some 300 metres from the ship and fired a single torpedo from his bow tube. The torpedo struck Bayano on the forward quarter and exploded.*

*Aboard Bayano the explosion flung most of those sleeping from their hammocks, killing many instantly in and around the engine room where the torpedo struck. This first explosion was followed by further detonations in the ship's magazine. The vessel filled with smoke and steam, and water rushed in through holes in her hull. The survivors later told many stories of heroism aboard at that time: wireless operators remaining at their posts broadcasting SOS messages; the sailor handing out lifejackets to his colleagues as the sea rose around him; and the captain going down with his ship having organised the evacuation of as many as possible.*

*Within minutes of the initial explosion Bayano sank by the bow, her stern rising into the air before vanishing in a steamy, smoky cloud. A final explosion heralded her disappearance. The suction caused by the ship sinking dragged down many who had jumped into the sea.*

*(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)*

*(continued)*



*The first vessel to arrive on the scene was the SS 'Castlereagh' of Belfast, its captain later to describe the scene confronting him as a 'sea of corpses in lifejackets'. He stopped his engines but, fearing the return of the same U-boat, then ordered full steam and set off to safely reach port.*



*Hours later the SS Balmarino also arrived at the scene of the sinking. Its captain, attracted by survivors waving from two of the ship's life-rafts and an upturned lifeboat, stopped to pick up twenty-four survivors.*

*(Right above: The image of the SS 'Balmaino' is from 'The Scottish Shipwrecks' web-site.)*

*Bayano was lost with over two hundred of her crew, including eleven Newfoundland sailors. A second source cites only twenty-six survivors, among them Leading Seaman Stephen Keates (458x) of Starr's Cove, Twillingate, rescued by the above-mentioned SS 'Balmaino'.*

*\*On August 19 of that same year, the U-27 was sunk and its crew killed by a British Q-ship in circumstances that in some quarters was considered to be a war-crime. The entire incident was apparently covered up by the British Admiralty.*

The personal information which is available *a propos* Seaman King has proved to be limited; the following *may* be correct but it requires confirmation:



The son of William King, fisherman, perhaps deceased in 1902, and of Josephine King (née Hayes), he may also have been brother to Marcella and to Michael. He named his next-of-kin as his uncle Thomas Hayes of Brigus.

*(Right above: The sacrifice of Seaman William King is honoured on the War Memorial in the community of Brigus. – photograph from 2010(?))s*

Seaman King died on March 11, 1915, at the *recorded* age of twenty years: a likely date and place of his birth appears to have been July 26 of 1895 in or about the community of Turk's Gut in the District of Port-de-Grave (this from a copy of the Newfoundland Vital Statistics); on his enlistment paper the date is cited as having been July 19, in Brigus, of that same year.

*Seaman King 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 William King 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 21, 2023.**