



Seaman Charles Victor Lewis, Number 1890x, is interred in the St. John's Salvation Army Cemetery in St. John's: Grave reference, Naval and Military Plot.

(continued)

Having relinquished his occupation as a longshoreman in the capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, on August 18 of 1915, Charles Victor Lewis reported...*to duty...*at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS *Calypso*, moored in St. John's Harbour (see below).

On that same summer 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 successfully 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.



(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.*)

**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.

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 thirty-six days* after having been...taken on strength...on 'Calypso', his sparse Service Records document that it was on September 23, having by that time been promoted from the rank of Seaman Recruit, that the now-Seaman Martin 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 waived by 'Royal Proclamation'.**

(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 is confirmed to 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 Charles V. Lewis 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 Lewis, the destination was to be *Pembroke I*.

**The time that he spent travelling from Newfoundland to England was counted as days of service at Pembroke I; Seaman Lewis likely did not report to Chatham until the end of the first week of October, 1915.*

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 Lewis 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.*



(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*)

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 Lewis would have likely worn an HMS ‘Pembroke’ cap-band.

Just over three months were to pass* with Seaman Lewis at *Pembroke I* awaiting a summons to service. It was to arrive at some time after that Christmas of 1915 and he was transferred* - perhaps physically, perhaps only on paper – to his new posting on January 11 of the New Year, 1916: it was to HMS *Zaria*, the Stores Carrier and Depot Ship in one of the remotest, most northerly, and yet most important corners of the British Isles at the time, the Orkney Islands.

The aforesaid importance was due to *Scapa Flow* in the Orkneys having been chosen as main anchorage for the British Grand Fleet – it was to be so in both World Wars.

As such, *Scapa Flow* and nearby sheltered waters had also become home to a number of supplementary flotillas and vessels which were in need of a multitude of services, these provided by the good ship HMS *Zaria* as will be seen below.



(Right above: *Warships at anchor at ‘Scapa Flow’ at the time of the Great War – although whether they are British or vessels of the surrendered German High Seas Fleet is not clear – from X-Ray Magazine)*

The vessel *Zaria* had been launched at the end of the year 1903 for the *British and African Steam Navigation Company* of Liverpool. In the years prior to the *Great War* she had sailed on routes to and from the Canary Islands, West Africa and the West Indies but in late 1914, with the onset of hostilities, she had been requisitioned by the Admiralty on November 26 of 1914, converted for use as a Stores Carrier and Depot Ship, and commissioned as HMS *Zaria* on December 10 of that same year.

The Auxiliary Patrol Base at Longhope, one of those aforesaid *sheltered waters*, was a part of the effort to blockade Germany, to prevent ships from delivering goods and materials to that country through the inspection of any and all shipping to German or to German-occupied ports. To this end, passenger and cargo vessels were requisitioned, armed and crewed by Royal Navy personnel with orders to stop, question, inspect and if necessary to board and seize vessels, be they enemy, neutral – or at times British – intercepted by the patrolling ships.

(continued)

The bases from which these Auxiliary ships operated and, of course, other Royal Navy bases were to become targets for the logical German reaction, and were in their turn visited by surface vessels, submarines and mine-layers. To counter this, the British Admiralty hired, built and requisitioned smaller boats, often fishing-vessels, to patrol and to sweep for mines.

These smaller vessels, drifters, trawlers, yachts and the like were often placed under the control of larger ships such as *Zaria* whose task – amongst others – was to cater to the supply, administrative and personnel needs of the aforementioned smaller vessels.



(Right adjacent: *The photograph of a peace-time (?) Zaria is from the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Historical Society web-site.*)

Thus, while Seaman Lewis was indeed transferred to HMS *Zaria*, it is not certain that he ever set foot on her deck. However, according to his Service Records, he was to serve in one of those minor vessels, a trawler which was, as seen above, *Zaria's* responsibility.



She was the requisitioned and then hired trawler *Newland*. Having been completed in 1903, she was a vessel of some two-hundred fifty tons which in 1914 had been converted and armed with a single twelve-pounder naval gun before entering war-time service in January of 1915 as a mine-sweeper.

(Right above: *Royal Navy armed trawlers in the port of Dover during the Great War – from the Imperial War Museum web-site...iwm.org.uk..*)

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



(Right below: *Seen here is a quick-firing naval twelve-pounder (the weight of the shell) and twelve hundred-weight (1200 lbs. the weight of the barrel and breech) gun, displayed as adapted for use in 1941, but perhaps such as found on the trawler 'Newland' in Seaman Lewis' war. – photograph taken at the Royal Artillery Museum 'Firepower', Woolwich, in 2010*)



Seaman Lewis was to serve at HMS *Zaria* for a total of eighty days until the last day of March although the exact duration of his service on HM Trawler* *Newland* is not to be found among his papers.

(continued)

****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.***

On that day, March 31, 1916, he was transferred back to Chatham and to HMS *Pembroke*.

There now passes a period of just over six months during which time he is documented as serving at *Pembroke* although what his duties were is not clear. Nor do the dates recorded, April 1 to October 9, ensure that he was at Chatham during this entire time – he was surely at some point sailing westward across the Atlantic.

These months were subsequently followed by a further period of one year plus seventy-eight days, from October 10, 1916, until January 27, 1918*, during which Seaman Lewis is recorded as having served on HMS *Briton*, the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) training ship in St. John's – with a void of twenty-two days during that time, from October 23, 1916, up until November 14.

The events of these above-mentioned days are possibly, may it be suggested, the following: Seaman Lewis, according to scarcely decipherable notes in the margin of his personal record, was now home because his war-time service pledge of one year had by then expired. Thus the above-noted October 23 was likely the date of his discharge.

His brother Gordon Campbell Lewis (see further below and elsewhere in these files) had by that time enlisted – in March, some six months prior – and having gone overseas had just joined the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment at *the Front*. Maybe inspired by his brother's actions, Charles Victor Lewis was now for a second time to enlist and to attest, but on this occasion, the date November 9, 1916, not into the Navy but into the Newfoundland Regiment where he was assigned the Regimental Number 3217.

Almost immediately he was to change his mind and on November 13 he sought a transfer from the Regiment back into the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland). His request was apparently immediately granted since, on the morrow, November 14, he was once again documented as being in service on HMS *Briton*. He was now to remain there for some nine weeks.

On January 28, 1918, the name of Seaman Lewis was inscribed anew on the nominal roll of HMS *Pembroke I* although, as seen before, during the first several days of this time he was likely not in England but making his way across the Atlantic Ocean. Once back at *Pembroke* he was once again to await a posting to a ship.

On June 10, 1918, his personal records show that Seaman Lewis was *officially* to be one of the crew of a mine-carrier, HMS *Cove*. The ship, with Seaman Lewis a crew-member, was to continue her work, apparently even following the cessation of hostilities on November 11, 1918. But exactly what that work was, or even *had* been during the War, is not clear since the vessel is described as a mine-carrier, not a mine-layer.

On February 14, 1919, Seaman Lewis was discharged from HMS *Cove*, the ship on that same date to assume a new role, that of a stores supply ship, and he was transferred to the shore-based Royal Navy establishment at Plymouth-Devonport, HMS *Vivid III*.

(continued)

April 12 of 1919 is the date found on Seaman Lewis' Service Records on which he was yet again on the books of HMS *Briton* in St. John's although what that particular date implies is not clear: was it the day of his departure from *Vivid III*? the date when his orders were issued? the date of his ship's sailing from England? the date of his arrival back in Newfoundland? or the date on which he reported to HMS *Briton*? The local newspapers appear to give no pertinent information.

All that is to be found of relevance is the date of his discharge from service: May 24 of 1919. Nor has it been recorded when it was that he first began to exhibit the symptoms of the disease to which he was soon to succumb.

(Right below: *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*)

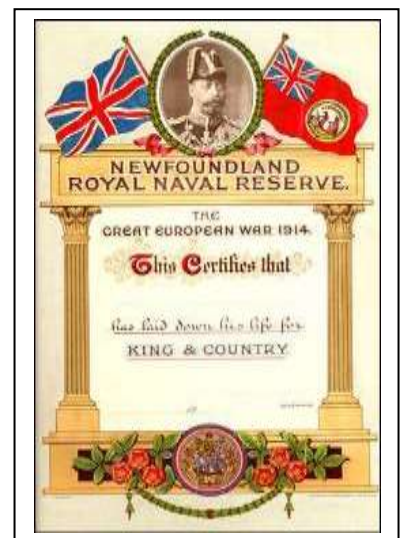
The son of Charles Noble Lewis, Lewis (engineer on the ships of *Messrs. Bowring Brothers* and who was to serve as such during the *Great War*, thereafter to receive a medal) and of Annie Laurie (also found as *Laura*) Lewis (née *Campbell**) of 53, Pennywell Road in the city of St. John's, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Eric-Campbell; to Hugh; Wilfred; Jessie; Annie; Doris-Emma; Gordon-Campbell**; John-Jellicoe; Mary (or *May*)-Patricia and to Wilson.

**The couple had been married in the city of St. John's on February 22 of 1895.*

Seaman Charles Victor Lewis was recorded as having died at home of illness...*meningitis*...on September 24 of 1919: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, September 26, 1896 (this date from his enlistment papers) but September 26, 1897 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register).

Seaman Lewis 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 Charles Victor Lewis was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



***His brother Gordon Campbell Lewis had enlisted in the month of March of 1916 and had sailed for 'overseas service' in July, later during that same year. He had then joined the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, already on 'active service' for well over a year, on October 12 – but recorded as October 14 – on the 'Western Front' in France at the time of the action at Gueudecourt.*

(continued)

On January 28 of the New Year of 1917, after a six-week Christmas retirement from the fighting, and serving with 'C' Company, he was one of the casualties of the day incurred while bringing in wounded – and also while carrying materials up to 'the Front' close to the small community of LesBoeuufs on the return to the trenches – of a heavy enemy artillery bombardment.

(Right: The grave of Private Gordon Campbell Lewis in the Guards' Cemetery, Combles. – photograph from 2010)

Private Gordon Lewis was to...die of wounds...later that same day while receiving medical attention in the 89th Field Ambulance.



As stated further above, a more complete account of Private Lewis' all-too-brief military career is to be found elsewhere among these files.

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.