

PEACH, W. H.



Seaman William Henry Peach, Number 1001x, having no known last resting place, is commemorated on a bronze beneath the Caribou at the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

Having answered the summons to service from the naval authorities, William Henry Peach relinquished his occupation as a fisherman working out of the Placentia Bay community of Red Harbour, and travelled to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland where, on August 7 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*.

William Henry Peach is recorded as being an *Old Reservist*, having already enlisted on January 3 of that 1914 and undergone the required medical assessment on that same day*. He had also at that time committed himself for a five-year term with the reserve and undertaken twenty-eight days of training before returning to his home.

The events of the summer of 1914 were then to result in a summons to war-time service only four days following the British Declaration of War as seen in the above paragraph. If he had not already done so, it would have been at this time that he was to pledge his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V.

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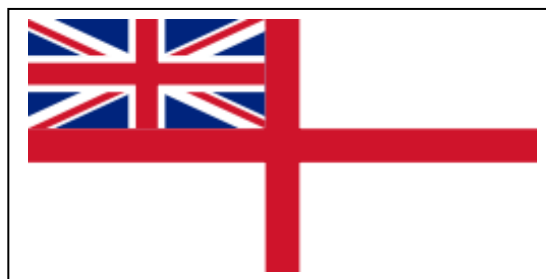


(Preceding page: George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India: as a boy and young man he had served in the Royal Navy from 1877 until 1891 and always retained a fondness for 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.)

(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.

(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)*

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)*

After some fifteen weeks spent in St. John's – what his tasks and duties were to be during this period is not clear - Seaman Peach, 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 19th, its reservist passengers unmentioned in the local newspapers.



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(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.)

****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'.***

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 Peach was one of those to be directly attached to a vessel. Thus on the day of his disembarkation in Glasgow he likely reported immediately to his ship for that was the port where his vessel was being re-fitted and where she was to be stationed. The ship was the SS *Bayano*.

***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 10th Cruiser Squadron, also known as the *Northern Patrol*, a force based at Scapa Flow – although often out of Liverpool - and originally having comprised out-of-date warships which, by that January of 1915, had been replaced by requisitioned ocean-going passenger-cargo ships fitted with guns, some as elderly as a number of the venerable 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 10th 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, the Shetlands and Iceland, a thankless job at the best of times: during the tempestuous winter months, even worse.

Two of the first losses during the War among those Armed Merchant Cruisers were to be vessels of the 10th 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 of crewmen died, of which twenty-two Newfoundlanders.

Bayano was to be the next.

(Right: *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:

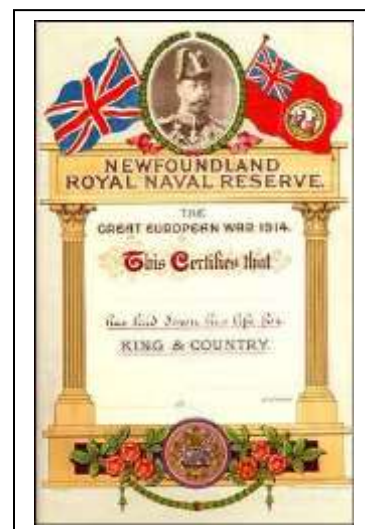
On 25th February, 1915 the submarine U-27 left Emden in the early morning. It was to be a sortie that would culminate in an attack on HMS Bayano in the Firth of Clyde two weeks later. The submarine passed north around Orkney on February 28, turned south west into the North Atlantic, then west of the 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.



(Preceding page: *A Memorial Scroll, a copy of which was distributed to the families of those who had sacrificed their life serving in the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve*)

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 Balmaino 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: The photograph 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 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 were considered to be a war-crime. The entire incident was apparently covered up by the British Admiralty.*

The son of Charles Duncan Peach, fisherman, and of Margaret Grandy (also found as *Grundy*) Loughlin Peach (née *Loughlin**, also found as *Louchlin*, reportedly deceased on April 21, 1906) of Red Harbour, Placentia Bay, he was also brother to Leander, Charlotte-Clara, Caroline, Phœbe-Maria, Jane and to Elias.

The couple had married on the Flat Islands, Placentia Bay (but District of Burin), on October 20 of 1873. Following his wife Margaret's passing Charles Duncan Peach re-married, to widow Martha Piercey (also found as *Pearcey*, née *Hussey*) on August 31, 1910, in Red Harbour.*

***Her son Charlie A. Piercey, also in the Naval Reserve, was lost as well on Bayano.*

Seaman Peach died on that March 11, 1915, at the recorded age of twenty-one years: date of birth at Red Harbour, Burin, Newfoundland, November 5, 1895 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register, this confirmed by the date on his enlistment files.

Seaman Peach 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 Henry Peach 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.